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The Black Cat

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Contents

The Black Cat Club		2
Putting on Arbutzoff	*Weare Holbrook*	3
Carter Robb Also Ran	*Louis Schneider*	8
At Six Bells, Saturday	*Herman Howard Matteson*	13
Tribulation and Calamity	*Augustin W. Breeden*	19
The One Witness	*L. B. Birdsall*	27
Mrs. Bilger's Victory	*Emma S. Jones and Geik Turner*	35
Zeke	*Horace J. Simpson*	39

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For Readers and Writers

OBJECT OF CLUB

The object of the club is to stimulate interest in the study of and writing of short stories by reading, studying and criticising the stories in The Black Cat. First reading the magazine, then arranging the stories in the order of their merit and writing a short criticism of each one.

WHO MAY BELONG

The club is composed of readers of the Black Cat Magazine. To become a member it is only necessary to subscribe to the magazine for a year. Price is $1.50 which includes the Beautiful Rose Gold Good Luck Black Cat Club Emblem.

CASH PRIZES

Prizes amounting to $50 are offered to members for studying the stories and sending in Best Criticisms and getting new members for the Club.
Ten dollars will be awarded to the member sending in the Best Criticism and for the criticisms ranking next best will be awarded, according to their order, two prizes of $5.00 each; four prizes of $2.50 and ten prizes of $1.00 each.

TIME OF CONTEST

Criticisms must be received at the office of The Black Cat, Salem, Mass., on or before the 20th of the month following publication and prizes will be awarded and mailed as soon thereafter as possible and announced in the third issue following.

SUCCESS OF THE CLUB

depends upon the interest taken in it and each member is expected to get others to join. A prize of $10 will be awarded to the member who secures the largest number of new members each accompanied by one subscription.

The Black Cat Club,
Salem, Mass.

Date.....

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THE BLACK CAT CLUB, SALEM, MASS.

PUTTING ON ARBUTZOFF

By WEARE HOLBROOK

The Suitcase Theatre cannot compete with the Portmanteau. It has the talent and puts on the best Russian plays and all that, but the assistant stage manager should have been cast for ticket taker. He simply isn't there as a stage manager.

AS he rolled into bed, Bindle whacked me between the shoulder blades with his knee and announced impressively—Bindle can be impressive even in pyjamas—"We've decided to put Arbutzoff on."

"It can't be done!" I exclaimed in amazement, without opening my eyes.

"Why not?"

Now I didn't want to tell him why not. I didn't want to tell him anything. Bindle is too argumentative late at night.

"Why can't we?" he insisted.

"Because," I explained wearily, "if they're on, why they're on, and they can't be off; and if they're off—" I fell asleep over the sheer logic of it.

Just as I was teaching Kerensky how to play roulette on a waffle iron, Bindle interrupted.

"You don't understand. The Club is going to put on a play—by Arbutzoff."

Then I remembered that once upon a time, eons ago, he had gone to a special meeting of the Aberdeen Club, in which he was a committee or something.

In the morning I got more details, whether I wanted them or not. The Aberdeen Club was to go in for dramatics—heavily—with Bindle in the lead. The Aberdeen Club, I may explain, is not devoted to cattle-raising, but to culture in its broadest sense, a sense that embraces Stoddard's Lectures and thé dansants with the same wild frenzy.

"This Arbutzoff," he informed me, between explosions over his collar-button, "is one of the coming dramatists. Of course, most of the people around here have never heard of him"—I bowed my head over the washbowl in shame—"but that is all the more reason why we should take him up. There is something about him that is so exotic—an indefinable touch of —of—ah—" he groped helplessly.

"Toothpaste?" I tossed him the tube, hoping to relieve his distress. It was not until after breakfast that he consented to speak to me again.

"Listen, old fellow," he began, laying his hand on my arm. "We're going to rehearse to-night. Don't you want to drop around and see how we get along?"

I was suspicious. Had he said, "Come to rehearsal," I would have been quite comfortable, but whenever he becomes demonstrative and says, "Listen, old fellow," I have a feeling that something is expected of me which I shall be loath to give.

Without a tickle of conscience I told him that we had decided to invoice now, instead of next winter. But I knew that eventually I should have to observe, if not participate in, a rehearsal, and my indignation was well controlled when Bindle informed me that I was cast for the part of assistant stage manager. I couldn't be violent—he was so meek and apologetic.

"You see, there's absolutely no one else. You must take it. The play comes off to-morrow night, at the Suitcase Theatre, and we have a dress rehearsal to-night."

So we started out immediately after dinner. From the way Bindle had been bellowing for the last three weeks, I supposed that he was the juvenile, at least.

"Where's your costume?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't wear any," he said airily.

"I—I thought this was a Russian play."

As Bindle's room-mate, I took a certain interest in his morals.

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"Well, you see," explained Bindle, "I'm one of the stage managers, too. Oscar Moss and Dr. Belden were to have been stage managers, but Moss wouldn't come to rehearsals, and Dr. Belden's liable to be called away any moment."

If I had a doubt as to the sort of play the Aberdeeners were to present, it was only heightened by the remarks of that high-chested dowager, Mrs. Neville. We found Mrs. Neville, the chief agitator, in the green room of the Suitcase Theatre. She was very busy, trying, as nearly as I could judge, to connect an electric fan to the gas jet. I thought perhaps she would not see us, but she did. She arose and approached me from two directions, with effusive greetings; she was fairly churning with cordiality. She had been sure I would come—Mr. Bindle had promised to get me and Mr. Bindle never broke a promise—I was certain to enjoy it—the Club would be grateful—and could I run a light cord from the back stage into the dressing room?

While she spoke to me of the "Club" as if I were a rank outsider, I wish here to state that I was a sometime member—a member in bad standing. I had withdrawn as gracefully as one can after having committed a *faux pas*. I had committed not one, but several—a regular faux trot. In apprehension lest the performers feel unappreciated, I had applauded vigorously during certain concerts, but not at the right time. When J. Fulton Follansbee, who has studied art abroad, gave a lecture on the "Ultra-Impressionists" under the Club's protection, I ran the stereopticon, and it seems that I put most of the slides in upside-down. I had one consolation—nobody noticed it except J. Fulton, but the knowledge of my guilt clung to me and I felt myself a perverted Aberdeener. So I dropped out, and until the Club needed an assistant stage manager I daresay I was never missed.

"The cord,"—she unburdened herself of seemingly endless coils, and gestured vaguely—"can run along there."

It remained for me to make it run. There was no property man; rummaging about, I found some staples and a monkey wrench. With these I performed a really remarkable feat of engineering. I felt intensely practical as I observed the neatness and efficiency of my work. I was resourceful; cast away on a desert island, I could get along as well as the next man. It was not until the Reverend Euclid Nasby entered and pulled the whole business down, that I realized I had fastened the cord across a door.

"I guess we're about ready to start," he remarked, untangling himself.

After that I did my wiring along the floor, with the help of gravity; it was much more convenient.

They called me a stage manager, but I was really an errand boy permitted to look on during spare moments. Then they told me I could be property man, too. That meant that I had to find a loaf of black bread, a violin, some yellow flowers and a chain, so that I didn't see much of the show. I got an idea of it, however.

It was a cheerful little one-act drama named "Bloody Dawn," and it tried to live up to its name. The scene was laid in a black canvas prison where the Reverend Euclid Nasby was supposed to be chained, indulging in soliloquies. I heard him make several startling assertions like, "Life is a river," and "I have loved—that is enough." The lines were rather weak, but he expected to get in a lot of action by rattling his chain. He was dressed according to directions, as "Samarav, a simple muzhik"—that is, he wore J. Fulton Folansbee's studio blouse (J. Fulton calls it a "blooz")—golf trousers, boots and a grove of whiskers. The Reverend Euclid is fat but emotional, and when he put on a belt and declaimed into his whiskers, one would have taken him for a simple muzhik anywhere. He was, in fact, the whole show. There were characters such as Prison Guards, a Priest, Voices Without, etc., but they were very minor, compared to Euclid.

Well, I found a good chain on a porch swing over at Brandin's furniture store, but I was stumped on the fiddle proposition, all the fiddle shops having shut up for the night. Furthermore, it seemed that there was not a loaf of black bread

at large in the community. I got a loaf of white bread and offered to make it black in a very few minutes, but the leading man objected. He had to gnaw it in prison, and he suspected my methods.

So we struggled along on white bread, and Mrs. Neville summoned her niece, Bertha May Evers, a high-school flapper who possessed a sorrel violin and a repertoire consisting of "Traumerei" and the "Mocking Bird." The violin was absolutely indispensable to the play, according to Arbutzoff; there must be weird music outside the prison window when Samarav has his vision.

Bertha May's "Mocking Bird" was plenty weird and her "Traumerei" was of the saddest, so I expected a hot contest. But "Traumerei" won in a walk.

"I think it really gives us what we are trying to get at," said Mrs. Neville, consolingly. "What Arbutzoff wants, and what we all want in our presentation tomorrow evening, is a sense of the—of the *Weltschmerz*"—I thought that would mean a trip to the delicatessen's, but she floundered on—"a sense of the utter hopelessness of it all—of brooding melancholy. The music furnishes a sort of *motif* running through what Samarav says—not so loud, Bertha May! *Pi-anissimo* so they can hear him talk—a sort of undercurrent of—brooding melancholy—"

I saw that she had lost an oar and was beginning to revolve, so I left in search of some yellow flowers then very much needed. Samarav, they told me, in jail because he had strangled the woman he loved, was to find a little yellow flower growing in his cell. Through this flower he learns the true meaning of life, and decides to die. He dies.

The yellow flower, therefore, was very important as a means of putting Samarav out of the way, and ending the play. I finally found one on a hat in the dressing room; I think it was a daisy. Anyway, I received a gust of thanks from Mrs. Neville, and started homeward with the consciousness of duties fulfilled; I had no desire to see the products of my labor in action.

"Don't forget—to-morrow night at seven-thirty sharp," Mrs. Neville called. "We'll be depending on you."

If she had not thrown those last words at me, I might have slept well when I got home, but responsibilities always give me disturbing dreams. I spent the night walking a slackwire, with Mrs. Neville on one shoulder, Bertha May Evers on the other, and a band of howling muzhiks, in huckleberry whiskers, shaking the wire.

At breakfast, I was a mere spectator. I felt rocky. Bindle was in fine spirits; stage-managing seemed to agree with him.

"If this play makes a hit to-night," he said, shooting me in the eye with his grape fruit, "we may put on another."

"By Arbutzoff?" I asked gloomily.

"No—Spervski."

I rose from the table.

"Bindle," I reminded him, "you should turn your head when you do that."

My spirits soon rose. In the library I discovered a gay little volume entitled "My Four Years in a Leper Colony." By dinner time I was feeling pretty cheerful, and at eight o'clock I was helping the Reverend Euclid Nasby on with his chains in the dressing room of the Suitcase Theatre, and actually enjoying it. They had printed my name on the programme.

After I had hitched up the leading man and planted the yellow flower in the prison floor, I took a peek through the curtain at the audience. There was a big crowd, not counting the ushers who were looking for J14 Center. I was surprised at the number of people who appeared to be interested in bloody dawns. Some of them were in dress suits.

"Let's start," I said to Mrs. Neville. "Everybody's here."

"Where's Bertha May?" she demanded suddenly. "I haven't seen a sign of her."

Whereupon she dived into the nether regions of the back stage, and emerged a moment later, much distraught.

"Bertha May—I just 'phoned her. She can't play 'Traumerei'!"

This was announced tragically. I had suspected it last night, but had said nothing.

"She can't play at all. She sprained her wrist!"

"Good Lord!" breathed the Reverend Euclid devoutly.

"Putting up fruit—sprained her wrist just putting up fruit." Mrs. Neville was beginning to liquidize.

"But what will we do?" wailed the Reverend Euclid in fuzzy helplessness.

Things did look dark. Right then and there the dramatic Aberdeeners held a little ante-mortem consultation.

"I think we can get along without music," Bindle asserted, having no ear for music anyway.

"Oh, but it adds everything to the play—or at least a great deal," amended Mrs. Neville, glancing at Samarav.

"I can play the saxophone," ventured one of the Voices Without.

Mrs. Neville recoiled in aesthetic horror.

"My brother-in-law, Charley Bahr," began a Prison Guard, with the air of unwinding a lengthy reminiscence, "used to have 'Traumerei' on his phonograph—mighty pretty piece, too—and I imagine that if the kids haven't broken it, he's still got it. Charley was always a good hand at keeping what he got—"

The Prison Guard was interrupted by excited questions. Could we get it? Where? How soon? Did he think it would sound all right? His was a suggestion worth listening to.

Of course, Bindle and I had to go over to Charley Bahr's. He put "Traumerei" on for us; it sounded fine—fancier than Bertha May's version, and fully as loud.

Bindle carried "Traumerei," I carried the machine, and we slipped in the back door of the theatre just as the Reverend Euclid Nasby was finishng his first soliloquy before a hushed and expectant audience. When we opened the door the draft shook the prison walls like an earthquake, but as the stage was in semi-darkness, I guess it wasn't noticed.

Mrs. Neville "ssh"-ed at us like a young locomotive, and I could see Samarav sitting on the prison floor, running his fingers through his carefully dishevelled locks, so I concluded that it must be one of the tense moments of the play. The play was full of tense moments, but the tensest ones were behind the scenes.

On tiptoe, creaking alarmingly, Mrs. Neville bore down upon me.

"Listen," she whispered—she had acquired a regular stage-whisper—"when he stands up by the window and says 'I see the light!' twice, you start the music and Mr. Bindle will turn on the pink lights."

That sounded simple enough, but it required a lot of waiting. I cranked up the machine gently and put in a new needle, and the Reverend Euclid, alias Samarav, talked and talked. It seemed that he was to be hung next morning. The priest came and asked him to confess. He told the priest the whole story of his life and then said he had nothing to say. The priest believed him and went out.

I began to think Samarav was never going to see the light. He rattled his chain, he laughed, he cried, he picked his flower and talked about it, he ate his crust of bread and talked about that.

Finally she stood up.

"What are my chains?" he shouted. "They are as nothing. What are these walls? For me they are no longer walls. I see the light—I see the light!"

Which he surely did. Several. Bindle tried every other color they had, before he found pink. Poor Bindle!

I pushed the lever that Charley Bahr had shown me, and the machine started with a contented purr.

"Ah, the dawn!" Samarav sighed, in beautifully tremulous chest-tones. "For me it is the dawn of a new life, Matushka—your voice seems to call me, Matushka, and I will come. It is the voice of the purple dawn—*a skinny, skinny lassie*—the purple dawn—*she's as thin as the paperrr on the wa-all*—my own heart ca——*sweet as the heatherrr*—"

To my horror I realized that Harry Lauder, and not "Traumerei," was accompanying Samarav. Furthermore, Harry was getting the best of the situation. Samarav coughed, hesitated, and spoke as through a beard, thickly.

I had forgotten how to stop the infernal contraption. Desperately I grabbed one of its offending parts in the vain hope of choking it, but it only babbled idiotically, *"and her knees—zanderneezandernee—"*

I could hear the audience laughing louder and louder; it was like an awful dream. Samarav was silenced; he signaled frantically for the curtain.

Finally I pushed something that stopped the phonograph with an angry yelp. But everyone was completely demoralized; the show was over.

Taking off the record, I turned it over. There, calm and serene, was "Traumerei."

The Aberdeen Club surrounded me—Samarav, Bindle, the Priest, the Prison Guards, the Voices Without, and most of all, Mrs. Neville. I could not explain. I did not try to. They all seemed to want to talk, and I was afraid not to let them; some of them looked apoplectic.

They were speechless with rage, but not speechless enough. Individually and collectively they cursed me. They do to this day. It isn't so bad; they do it in the very best English. But it worries me to think what Arbutzoff may be saying about me in Russian.

THE SEPTEMBER NUMBER

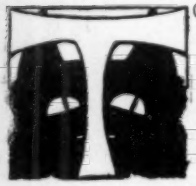
THE CUSTODY OF THE DOG *by Chart Pitt* will be the lead story for September. It is the best story Mr. Pitt has written since THE LAW OF THE ABALONE, which you will recall as one of last year's prize winning stories and as one which was included among the best stories of the year. THE CUSTODY OF THE DOG is somewhat different from the usual style of story written by this author. In it, you will meet Aunt Avaline Plunket, who is going to have the Bland Block remodeled and start a weekly newspaper, and Uncle Amos Bland, whose ambition is to start a racing stable, organize a ball team and put Fremont on the sport map. You will also make the acquaintance of young Doctor Bland and Wellington, the dog. They are the principal reasons why Aunt Avaline doesn't make much headway as a real estate operator and journalist and why Uncle Amos gets a bad start in putting Fremont on the sport map.

Two other stories for September will be APPLE PIE AND HIGH FINANCE *by Arthur Lynne Sizemore* and REFORM MEANDERS *by Josephine Sesnan Cronin.* The first will make you say something nice about the feminist movement, and the second will make you take it all back.

CARTER ROBB ALSO RAN

By LOUIS SCHNEIDER

A defeated candidate's expense account isn't expected to show a profit. But Carter Robb cares nothing for precedent. His expense account resembles nothing so much as the profit and loss sheet of a prosperous tradesman.



TO him who could read it, the brim of Carter Robb's hat told the story of how his days were spent. From being pressed between the back of his head and the rough walls of his cabin while he held down a dangerously back-tilted chair, it stuck up as impudently at the back as the tail of any wood wren in the tangles of Moark county, whose lazy, hazy hills lay all about. That feature of it voiced a sort of defiance for what views the world might hold for the balance of Rob's make-up—skeleton, flesh, skin, clothes, and the rest of his make-up—which had reached a state of droopiness demanding early action if the whole were to be saved from entire loss of its languid hold on deferred hopes, and a consequent lapsing into utter disrepute.

Robb hadn't been born with a whittling stick in one hand and an open knife in the other, but he had acquired the whittling habit and developed it to such an extent that his wife sarcastically professed to be afraid of what tragedy might be enacted in their sagging bed on that night when Robb in his slumbers should attack a stick of dream pine with a very real Barlow blade.

Robb's wife looked as washed out as her oldest calicoes. She twisted her hair up in such a tight, round little knob at the top of her head that if she had owned such a thing as a "sto'-boughten hat" you certainly and instinctively would have looked into it for the other half of the snap fastener. Its tightness seemed somehow overdone, yet further glance would have convinced you that in that hard little knob and the one corner of her mouth which lifted a trifle sarcastically lay safety for her features. But for the restraining influence of these the immobile mask which is the lot of so many of her kind would have sagged into an expression of unrelieved tragedy.

The fact that his wife was passing in and out at the door at his elbow, about the business of a week's wash, did not disturb Robb; but it was evident that something was being turned slowly over in his mind this morning, for his knife had produced far less whittlings than usual. The way in which he let the soft pine stick get away from him and in which he again recovered it proved that it was something far removed from the realm of immediately visible things that filled his mind.

"Mahaly," he announced finally as he hooked his heels more securely on the rounds of the chair and slipped farther down in his seat, "I'm goin' to run for sheriff, so I am."

She tobogganed two fists full of garments off the lower end of the washboard and held that position while she ran a double-edged glance over him. "That's so you'll stand a chanct not get run in some o' these days on account o' your shif'lessness," was her verdict.

"Just the same, I'm a-goin' to run, so I am."

"Sooner you git started, the better."

"Good idee," he rejoined. He dropped his chair to its unaccustomed all-fours and rose. With thoroughness he searched his pockets and collected sundry coins, which he counted as he went. "A dollar seventy-three. Well, it'll have to be enough. Who ever heerd o' a candidate havin' to pay his way, anyhow? Goo'bye, Mahaly."

The sarcastic corner of her mouth lifted ever so little. "Good-bye, if you call that gone," she chanted to an accompaniment of sudsy splashings, without looking up. "Guess you'll ride that old pelt that Deacon Flint hung onto you last week."

"That old Blucher hoss is a good hoss," defended Robb.

"Yeah—but for what?"

"He's got good blood in him, I tell you. Aw, you'd 'a-kicked if you'd 'a-knowed I been tradin' pocket knives, an'"—he exhibited his knife triumphantly—"I allus git the best of 'em at that! That blade's a dandy, an' I got a dime an' a nickle plug o' chawin' to boot. Still, the fust time I dast trade anything bigger 'thout lettin' you know fust, you—"

She stopped her splashings and gave him an eye before which his fell. "Some day," he began, "you'll feel different—"

"Git back on your chair an' finish your mornin's work, Cart," she snapped. "'Tain't every day you find a whittlin' stick as good as that'n."

"Dogged 'f I do! I'll show you, so I will."

He stalked away to the rear of the cabin and to the rickety stable. Five minutes later he rode out the back way without so much as a farewell glance.

"Durned 'f I don't just natchally bust loose plumb right for this, so I will, just to show her."

He hailed the first wayfarer he met. "Hey, Cleet, stop a minute. I'm runnin' for the nomination for sheriff, an' I want you to vote for me, so I do."

"You don't say!"

"I do say, though."

"Why, there's seven after hit, already."

"I know it. That'll give me all the better chanct."

"Mebbe. Mebbe not."

"Sure. An' the nomination on our ticket is as good as bein' elected. I'm a-goin' to see everybody I can, an' if I don't git there 'twon't be 'cause I didn't try."

He rode until night, and every man whom he met was bluntly asked for his vote. Some laughed; some said they would consider the matter; some promised. Through it all he kept working industriously. Late in the afternoon of the second day he rode through a gap into a field where he heard the sound of an axe.

"Why, hello, Nate," he greeted as he came near the worker. "I wondered who was tearin' round in here. Say I'm tryin' for th' nomination for sheriff on our ticket, an' I want you to vote for me."

"Runnin' for sheriff?" The other mopped his forehead vigorously. "I thought when I saw you ridin' up that mebbe you'd took to tradin' hosses, by the look o' things."

"An' if I was," asserted Robb, "I'd be tradin' off a mighty good 'n."

"Good'n?" His listener took off his broad-brimmed straw hat and thoughtfully hung it on a protruding hipbone of the animal in question, and mopped the top of his head. "Good for what?"

Robb turned in his saddle and brushed off the offending hat as one would brush away a half-witted fly. "Durn it, that's what my wife said. I see right now you don't know nothin' about hosses, so you don't. I shore hoped you had more sense thataway than my wife. Let me tell you somethin'—"

He launched into a history and pedigree that soon had the other man looking the horse over closely and prying open its mouth to look at its teeth. The outcome of it was that, after having stayed all night at this place, he rode away on a different horse of much the same sort, eleven dollars and twenty-five cents in money, and at the end of a long cord he led a liver-spotted hound pup. That day he got the dead-sure promise of half a dozen voters and the I'll-think-about-its of as many more. But when night came it was not this of which he was most proud. At the farm where he had stopped for dinner he had traded off the hound for an old six-shooter, a silverine watch that had undoubtedly been bought by the pound, and a better cinch for his saddle.

But his host for the night gave him a bit of news while they sat and talked after supper, which, in the end, took the edge off his prospect of winning the nomination.

"You don't say!" he ejaculated after he had heard it. "Bill Hartsock's out o' the race, eh? Well, that'll give me more o' a chanct."

"Well, no. Hartsock got out in favor of Jim Timmons, you see. Tom Hicks engineered the deal, and he's big enough to purty near swing it through, I reckon. Timmons'll make a mighty good sheriff, too. With him behind a gun, I don't reckon anybody'll start anything much."

Robb considered this last gravely while a furtive hand felt of the lump caused by the six-shooter in his inside coat pocket.

"I believe a man had ort to be enough o' a man," he declared, "not to have to use any shootin' irons to back him up when he says anything." He yawned and looked at the clock. He drew out his watch and compared the time. "Say, ain't your clock just a leetle mite slow?"

"Set it by my watch, and it's gen'ally about right."

There was an immediate comparison of watches, and before he went to sleep Robb placed under his pillow a watch whose ticking was far less vigorous than that of the one he had acquired at noon. Also, he was richer by a fairly good single shot rifle, taken in on the deal.

On the following morning, after having drawn from his host a promise to vote for him, Robb rode away. At a cross-roads he came upon a prairie schooner, the gypsying occupants of which were loading up preparatory to the day's journey. There was a calf belonging to the outfit, however, which apparently was not of a mind to gypsy this morning. It had its owner badly tangled up in its stake rope, and cursings and bawlings mingled as the two went down together. Robb rode up and looked on while the tangle untangled itself. The owner yanked the panting calf up to him and aimed a vicious kick at it. He missed, and caught sight of Robb at the same time.

"Want to buy—this—"

"Don't say it," advised Robb. "Yeah, I'll dicker with you."

By dint of hard bargaining he came off with the calf without parting with more than the rifle and the watch.

"Say," he yelled back after having ridden some distance, "I forgot to say anything to you about it, but if you happen to be votin' here in this year's primary I want you to vote for Carter Robb for sheriff—that's me!"

Dragging his newly-acquired and unwilling property, he went on. At a steep ford trouble waited for him. The banks were slippery with mud from a recent rise, and as his horse floundered out on the opposite side the calf suddenly decided to stop below. The unexpectedness of this action jerked Robb out of the saddle and off his steed. Luckily he had an arm crooked through the reins; for the horse whirled, slipped the reins over his head, and began to back away. Prostrate in the mud, Robb kept his hold of both calf and horse. Every time he made a move to rise, one or the other would bring him down again.

Finally the horse won in the tug of war, and Robb came to the level of the bank. Always far from being a silent man when circumstances demanded words, he lifted the floodgates of speech as he flung and scraped the mud off himself.

"Mahaly'd have somethin' to do 'f she could git holt o' these here clothes now," he chortled finally. "Wouldn't this hit her on the funnybone, though— An' me runnin' for sheriff!"

At the next farm-house he stopped, making sure that he was far enough away. Whistling the farmer out he turned himself slowly about.

"Ain't that a heck o' a note?" he wanted to know. "Seein' me an' you are nigh of a size, have you got an old suit you could part with for a dollar or two, mebbe?"

It so turned out that the farmer had, and, retiring to the barn, Robb effected a quick change. When he came out the farmer was making friends with the calf.

"What'll you take for him?" he asked.

"Dunno's I want to sell him. I—well—my wife's been wantin' a calf like that for a long time, but I don't reckon she'd mind if I'd sell this one if I could git another one somewhere—provided I got enough out o' it."

"Well, what do you think he's worth?"

"Hummmm! He's mighty good stock, so he is, an' I had ort to have about two dollars, anyway, for the trouble I've had with him—so we'll say about nineteen dollars an' a half would be about right, don't you reckon?"

A little haggling realized the sum, and with his old clothes strapped behind the cantle, Robb rode on. The people with whom he stayed that night had a good laugh with him over his story of the mishap of the morning.

"Not half bad clothes right now," he laughed, displaying the soiled garments, "'f they was only washed. Ain't got anything you'd trade me for 'em? They'd just about fit you, mister, so they would."

"Nothin',—'cept an old fiddle, maybe."

"Let's see her."

When Robb rode out the next morning he carried over his shoulder the old violin in a battered case. He traded horses again that afternoon, adding twelve dollars to his belongings, but the violin and the six-shooter he failed to turn.

About an hour before sundown he was ambling along through a strip of woods, fingering the weapon in his pocket and wondering where and how he would be rid of it to advantage, when his horse stumbled and lurched forward. There came the crash of splintering wood. The violin case jumped on his back, and the thousandth part of a second later came the sound of a rifle shot from beside the road. Robb jerked his hand out of his pocket to help gain his balance, and out with it came the weapon on which it had been resting.

Like a flash he swung the muzzle on a point where a little tongue of smoke had belched out of a bush.

"C'mout of it!" he barked.

A long, lanky form, bearing a longer muzzle-loading rifle sulked into view. The scowl of hate on his face changed to one of utter surprise.

"Goodness gracious Agnes!" exclaimed the newcomer. "Ex-cuse me! I shore thought you was Zeb Stewart! By heck, I did! You're a-wearin' of his clothes, or I'm a liar."

"I may be a-wearin' 'em," incised Robb, "but you're worse'n a liar, an' if I ever git to be sheriff—which I'm a-runnin' for right now, and I want your vote at the primary; Carter Robb's my name— I'll see to it that your sort'll git what's a-comin' to 'em. What if I am a-wearin' clothes I swapped Zeb Stewart out of honestly?"

"Hope I didn't hurt you none," fretted the other.

"That reminds me, so it does." Robb swung the case off his shoulders and opened it. "Doggone you," he burst out, "You've went and played it now! Lookee here! Busted the neck plumb off'n it!"

He flung the tangle of wood and strings into the roadway. "That'll cost you twenty dollars, so it will!"

"Twenty—dollars! That fiddle wasn't wuth that!"

"Twas—an' more. Just when I was a-fiddlin' myself into the sheriff's office you come along and— You needn't snort! Bob Taylor, over in Tennessee, fiddled hisself into the Gov'nor's chair onct, as everybody knows. Come acrost with that twenty."

"I hain't got no twenty."

"What have you got?"

The culprit dug out an ancient tobacco bag and held an accounting.

"Thirteen dollars and sixty-seven cents," he owned to. "An' it hain't more'n onct in thirteen years an' sixty-seven months that you'd catch me with that much."

Robb studied a moment and then dropped his weapon in his pocket.

"Gimme ten. You vote for me in the primary an' boost me all you can in this neck o' the woods an' we'll call it square."

"Lawd bless you, that sounds good to me," joyed the other. "You could've shore put the fixin's to me for fair."

"I'm goin' to stay with you over night, if it ain't too far," announced Robb.

That night he got rid of the six-shooter.

At the end of the week another of the candidates dropped out of the race, and, inside of two weeks, another. Each time he who retired tried to swing his following to some other candidate, but none retired in favor of Robb. Two weeks before the primary there were but three left in the race, and these stuck.

Robb kept busy. He had the promise of many votes, and hopes of enough to carry him to victory. But he wasn't to be satisfied with hopes. He got busier. The nearer he came to the end of the campaign, home, and his wife, the harder he fought for the thing he was after.

On the Sunday before the primary he made for the county seat. On Monday he was out early and in late, and in vigorous fettle. On the day of the election he tried his best to see every man who had a vote to cast. But it was an utterly glum Robb who rode homeward on Wednesday morning, head down and rein slack.

"Hello!" greeted someone. "Got whipped, didn't you?"

He looked up. It was Nate Steele, riding the very horse on which Robb had come away from home. The horse was in far better shape than it had been at the time of the trade, but Steele's appreciative eye took in the one on which Robb sat.

Robb merely nodded in reply to the other's question.

"Pretty good nag you're settin' a-straddle of," commented Steele.

Robb nodded again.

"How'll you swap?"

Robb sighed deeply. "Might as well, I reckon. Thought I'd kind o' like to keep this'n, but I don't somehow seem to have no ginger in me no more."

But just the same Nate Steele paid well for the bargain they struck.

Robb did not even trouble to mount after he parted from Steele. He led the horse from there all the way home. He tried to sneak in, but his wife happened to see him coming. After he had turned Blucher into the stable lot he walked up to the house.

His wife had gone to work in the garden by this time, so he reached inside the door, lifted out a chair, placed it at a proper distance from the wall to tilt back nicely, searched out a soft pine stick, and perched himself in his old position.

He whittled slowly. The sun lengthened the shadows, so that he had to jerk down the slouch brim of his hat more and more. After a time his wife passed him, still without speaking, and went in and busied herself with the evening housework. Finally she thrust out her head.

"Supper," she laconized.

Robb rose slowly and went in, and they ate supper in silence.

"Got beat, didn't y'?" she prodded as she crossed knife and fork on her plate.

He nodded. "Bad."

"I see old Blucher's in a little better shape than when you rode him off," she ventured, "an' you're lookin' some slicker, an' you're wearin' some better clothes. Still got your dollar seventy-three, or have you been borryin' somewheres where you won't never pay it back?"

For answer he placed before her a package which he drew from an inner pocket. "I wa'n't 'bleeged to borry none," he glummed.

She opened the package. With an exclamation she slipped back her chair and rose. In unbelief she thumbed the bundle of bills which she held.

"Two hundred and fifty-seven dollars! Cart Robb, where'd y' git it, I want to know? You didn't—didn't—"

He had drawn his chair over to a clear place by the wall, settled his hat firmly on his head, and tilted back so that the wren's-tail of a brim stuck straight up along the logs.

"Made most of it swappin' hosses," he mumbled. "Swapped seventeen times."

He slumped lower while she digested this information.

"An' you done all that in the time you was gone? Set up. That ain't nothin' to be ashamed on. I see right now what you was cut out to make a livin' at."

He thudded the chair forward, dropped his elbows on his knees, and his head between his hands.

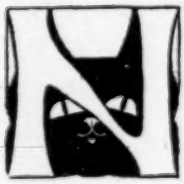
"Yes, I allus 'lowed I c'd make it at that, but—Mahaly! Goshamighty! They whupped me! They done it by underhanded tradin' around an' promisin' o' deputyships an' all that sort o' thing; but—they whupped me!"

A sad tear jerkled down the side of his nose, hesitated a moment, gathered itself bitterly together, and in utter dejection let go all holds and dashed itself to pieces on the floor.

AT SIX BELLS, SATURDAY

By HERMAN HOWARD MATTESON

Two smugglers and a revenue officer dine at the same table. They have all the requisites of a good dinner, including something to eat; but two of of them lose their appetites when a scrap of paper is laid upon the table.



O one knew his name, and year after year, for sufficient reason, he forbore to enlighten the curious. Latterly, however, he had been called "Denim," or "Old Den," a sobriquet acquired when, surprised at night on board his yawl by the "gold-braiders," he had gone over the side in a state of nakedness, if not of innocence, had swum ashore, broken into a summer cottage, fashioned himself a pair of trousers from a window hanging, with a potato knife, overcasting the seams with wrapping twine, and, in this garment nattily arrayed, had contrived finally to reach his little cabin secreted upon the side of Doe Bay Mountain, Orcas Island, of the San Juans of Puget Sound.

At this time, deciding that it might prove strategic to shift his base, Dan repaired to Blakeley Island, some three miles distant, built him a driftwood cabin near the beach in a spot admirably sheltered by a thicket of scrubby fir and alder.

This move, Dan always accounted the most fortunate in the entire log of his life's tempestuous voyage. An eighth of a mile distant from the new shack, lived Toketie and her brother Dave. Dave was a furtive, undecided sort of youth, about twenty years of age. Toketie, a couple of years older, while her sympathies were broad as the bay before her shack, was quite as resistless, when her affections or dislikes were engaged, as its surging tides.

Yes, decidedly epochal in the unrighteous career of the smuggler, was the meeting with Toketie. Toketie knew Den was a smuggler, yet in her Old Den met, for the first time in twenty wicked years, some one who took him on faith, asked no questions, propounded neither advice nor rules of conduct.

Old Den had a way of never going exactly where he appeared to be going, a habit which had conduced not a little to his continued untrammeled enjoyment of the open air and scenery of the islands. At the moment, for example, his speed boat, the acquisition of which had marked a distinct industrial advance over the limitations of the heavy yawl of former days, came tearing through Obstruction Pass, headed apparently for East Sound. Off the point of Blakeley Island, where the rugged cliffs with their softening fringe of fir cast lengthening shadows across the bay, Den put the wheel hard down, cut in the muffler, slid along in the syrupy smoothness of the dark, in-shore waters, came to anchor, landed in the dingy which he had had in tow and drew it from sight into a willow thicket.

Looking to right and left, Den cautiously made his way to his cabin clearing. He did not enter at once. Instead, with a blunt hand, and a wrist as thick and knotted as a towing hawser, he parted the brush and peered about sharply. Between his gray-green eyes showed two deep, ugly wrinkles. A perpetual mood of apprehension, dignified, ennobled by a desperate defiance and a courage unquestioned, had limned his leathern face with lines that, while sinister and forbidding, yet lent to his countenance a cast that was both ominous and heroic. Den's scowl, like the rattle of the honest diamond-back, meant business always.

As he neared the cabin door, he came to a sudden stop, then advanced slowly, A note had been pinned to the panel. Gin-

gerly, Den took down the missive, spread it upon his palm, began to read. As he read, the bushy eyebrows began to lift, smoothing away the scowling wrinkles. The corners of his mouth drew up. Denim chuckled.

"Dear Old Den:—Don't forget to enter in your reckonin' that you're to warp in Saturday afternoon at six bells, come alongside, and h'ist a cargo of chuck. There'll be buckets of your favorite black tea, and a hull scow load of them currant buns of whom you are so fond. Yours with *hiyu tikegh*, Toketie."

"'Yours with *hiyu tikegh*,' much love. 'Toketie.' I swear!"

Grinning still, Den unlocked the door, entered the cabin, re-read the note, laid it upon the table. He glanced up at the small ship's clock ticking upon the wall. Even as he looked, the clock struck five bells, half past two. In half on hour it would be six bells, the hour of Toketie's party. This was Saturday. He had half an hour.

Running an experimental palm over his face, Den slopped some cold water into his shaving mug, and began to puddle it about with a stubby, worn brush.

One side of his face lathered, Den suddenly dropped the brush back in the mug, stepped into his tiny lean-to sleeping room, and began pawing about in a battered, leather trunk. Presently he fetched forth a tintype, corners bent, and with the lacquer finish here and there peeled from the metal. This was a typical tintype portrait of a little girl about three years of age, sitting in an awkward, cross-legged posture upon one of those monstrous, upholstered stools never found, fortunately, outside the domain of the itinerant photographer.

A moment Den surveyed the tintype fondly, then returned it to the trunk. It was his little girl, whom he hadn't seen for twenty years. If alive, she'd be Toketie's age.

"Why," communed Den as he completed the operation of lathering, "her and Toketie looked as much alike as two Dolly Varden trout. They do; I swear they do."

He wagged his head to the slap of the razor as he whacked it back and forth upon a bit of trunk strap. "They do look alike," he repeated, betraying an obsession to which he had clung with fanatical persistance in the face of the fact that his little girl had had blue eyes, while Toketie's eyes were brown.

A rasping scrape or two, a glance at the ship's clock, and again Den approached the table to re-read the invitation. "My favorite currant buns! I swear!"

Then continued the rasp of the blade as he talked to himself out of the twisted corner of his mouth. "O' course Dave'll be there—and Rolly. Sure, this Rolly party'll be there. And I'm glad of it, yes, I am. I do just hope nothin' brings I and Rolly to a bight before the articles is signed, the weddin's said. Wouldn't it be turrible if I and Rolly collided head on before him and Toketie's married, and I just had to kill him, just had to? I swear I hope not."

The spume upon the unshaven portion of his face began to billow and heave as this thought, like a troublous wind, blew upon his soul.

"I gotta be careful," he admonished himself, "yeah, 'cause him and Toketie's dead in love. I seen that right away. And that's good. I wants her married, settled down, and not gallivantin' around to them cannery dances, yawin' around the floor, rove about by the arms of fish-pirates, beachcombers, smug—"

Old Den caught himself suddenly, but went on stubbornly. "I mean it, smugglers. If I don't know the likes of them hain't for her, who does? Who does, I say? I don't want Toketie to them dances. I wants her married to a good man, and decent. That, this Rolly party is. Yes he is, even if he was sent here to ketch I and Dave. What's that got to do with it, when it comes to sizin' up whether he's fitten for Toketie? Nothin', I say, nothin'."

Smirking with satisfaction into the mirror, he went on: "This Rolly party fooled Toketie and he fooled Dave, but he never fooled me, not for the while of a piston stroke. No. Them soft hands, wearin' a necktie with a flannel shirt, a regular

watch chain—fishermen wears leather lanyards—fool me? What does get me though is why he hain't performed long ago. He's had chances. Why, he had Dave dead to rights; Mudhead Dave warpin' in with cargo, never givin' a look to port or sta'board, and there this Rolly quilled up in the jungles. Why, he could a-took Dave, Rolly could, like a mink takin' a sick water rat. I swear I don't *cumtux* that at all. It can't be Rolly hain't got the sand. No. If this Rolly party hain't got sand, I'm a tusker walrus, and I gen'ally always read a man's chart right; I've had to."

Denim doused his face in the basin, scrubbed it vigorously with a rough towel. A thought had struck him suddenly, and he came to a pause, the towel lacking a few inches of the desired nail. "That might be—Rolly crazy over Toketie—he he hain't had the heart, Dave bein' her brother. I swear!"

He glanced at the ship's clock. He'd have to hurry, or he would be late.

Unbuckling his belt, he slid into a clean, flannel shirt, the operation requiring the placing aside for the moment of the heavy, old styled, six-shooter. As he hauled in on the belt he gazed down at the gun. Here was a fine point in etiquette upon which he was anything but clear.

"Should I ought to pack you along, or shouldn't I? I wouldn't bust Toketie's party, or her weddin'—still—"

He picked up the heavy gun, thrust it into his belt, then donned his tarpaulin coat, draping the skirts of the latter discretely over the weapon. Locking the door, he hurried up the rail.

As Den walked in at the kitchen door unannounced, Toketie, her face flushed from close communion with various pots and kettles bubbling on the kitchen stove, looked up and gave him a hearty Siwash welcome, *"Klahowa, tillicum."*

Den grinned at the girl fondly, walked across the floor to the door opening into the combination dining and living room, through which, also Indian fashion, he first thrust his head, then followed it with his body. No one was there but Dave, who gave the old man a cunning lear, jerked his head suggestively in the direction of the dense wood back of the house.

Toketie bustled in with some dishes, and a hand full of knives and forks. "We're all here now, and ready to cut our hawse, exceptin' Rolly. He'll be here; I seen him pass up the back trail half a hour ago."

Again Den and Dave exchanged glances, the look of the latter carrying a decided degree of discomfort and apprehension.

"There's another party, too, hain't here," added Den. "Where 'bouts is Jerry at?"

"Drat Jerry," answered Toketie impatiently. "He stole my thimble this morning, and I've hunted high and I've hunted low. Drat that bird, Den. When you wished that robber off onto me you done me low."

Den chuckled. Jerry was a tame crow that Den had captured when in the pin feather stage, and presented to Toketie. Jerry, while acknowledging the domicile of Toketie as his home, had never forgotten Old Den, and Old Den had never forgotten Jerry. Jerry would follow the old man all over the island, or fly sometimes a mile into the offing to alight upon the prow of the home-coming boat. Between Jerry and Old Den there was honor, and understanding.

"He'd steal the hair offen your head, that Jerry bird would," averred Toketie. "They hain't a thing safe in the house. Lay down a spoon—gone. Even postage stamps I gotta pack into the Bible and lay a stone on the cover. Here yesterday he makes off with a hull new paper of pins—gone."

"Hain't he a smart bird!" exclaimed Old Den admiringly.

"Smart! He's just plain *hiyu kapsula*, which is low down thief. I guess I'll live through the shock if he don't never come home."

Officiously Den followed Toketie back into the kitchen and removed the tarpaulin coat with a flourish. He was going to help. "He'll be here, this Rolly will," said Den comfortingly. "This Rolly party hain't no fool."

Toketie blushed. Then catching sight of the huge six-shooter protruding from Den's belt, she pointed.

"Where's your red flag, Den? Don't you know a craft dassent warp into a friendly port loaded with bum-bum 'less it flies the red square? It hain't perlite to pack a fizgig to a party. No."

With one deft move, Toketie achieved a feat unique in the annals of Puget Sound smugglers—she separated Old Den from his gun.

Stepping into the dining room, she laid the weapon upon a shelf and returned to the kitchen. Rolly's halloo, sounding from the trail, announced his coming, and Toketie and Den gathered up the multiplicity of dishes containing the feast and placed them upon the table.

Then in came the belated Rolly. Something of sadness mingled with undisguised affection was in the look which he directed at Toketie. For an instant his keen gray eyes rested upon Den, then shifted to Dave, who squirmed uneasily in his chair, arose for no especial reason and seated himself again.

The party was on. Beside the "buckets of black tea and the scow load of currant buns," there was meat, and potatoes, and gravy, and pie, a bill of fare possibly not in vogue at afternoon tea affairs on the mainland, but absolutely the proper thing for a San Juan Island blow-out.

Famously the function progressed. Den cargoed up with tea, and more tea, and more buns until it seemed likely, as he declared, that he would start a seam.

The feast had progressed well toward its close, when, with a discordant "awk," the marauding Jerry alighted upon the sill of the open window, hopped to the edge of the table, and laid down a torn strip of thin, gaudy paper bearing a number of Chinese characters.

Dave's eyes started as he caught sight of Jerry's plunder; his jaw jarred open, remained pendulous; his face turned a sickly, fish-belly white and he guiltily shifted his eyes from before Rolly's stern scrutiny. The countenance of Old Den was as rugged and impassive as that of a stone gargoyle. Toketie gave a quick gasp as she read culpability in the weak face of her miserable brother. The bit of paper was a strip torn from the label of a five tael tin of Pen-Yen smoking opium.

Jerry fetching in the tell-tale label, the hang-dog looks of the craven Dave—a discourse from the house top could not have told her more.

Now Toketie understood Dave's sudden access of zeal, the truth about his lying tales of fishing the fruitful night tides, from whence had come the money that chinked unfamiliarly in his pockets. Den, she knew Den was a smuggler, or had been. But Dave—

Her lover's stern face was staring down at the betraying opium label. "I've followed Jerry for days," he said slowly, "all over this island. But the rascal knows his business. I know there's a cache of hop somewhere. Jerry knows—there's the evidence—but he won't tell me." Rolly laughed dryly, picked up the label, folded it absently in his fingers.

Her eyes staring wildly at his speech, Toketie leaned across the table, thrust her face fairly into that of Rolly.

"You're not a fisherman—you're a revenuer, a gold-braider. You've followed Jerry! Not a fisherman! A gold-braider! A lyin' sneak, that worms its way into our confidence—takes us off guard—coaxes us and tricks us into trustin'—then—"

"I'm sorry, Toketie," said Rolly gently, shoving back his chair. "I had rather, much rather this had not happened now. I had intended to tell you—after your party. It's too bad. We'll have it over and done. Den, you and Dave take a walk with me, show me where this label came from. You might as well."

As Rolly arose, Old Den, with an animal-like cry, clapped his hand to his empty belt. At the move, Rolly thrust his hand toward his shoulder holster, but Toketie was quicker than he. In a flash she had Den's great six-shooter from the shelf above her head, had the muzzle pressed against the revenuer's breast.

"No you don't," she shrilled, "no you don't. *Klatawa,* Den and Dave! Hurry! I'll stick him up till you're safe. Hurry!

If he makes a move—Hurry! Don't let no sand run your glass!"

With a whimpering cry, Dave burst through the door and went plunging down the trail toward Den's cabin. Den, walking slowly toward the kitchen, turned and regarded the tableau. Rolly's face was pale as his eyes remained fixed upon the black gun barrel. The free hand of Toketie was quaking like a birch leaf in a gale, but her gun hand was as steady as the rock cliff beside the cabin.

Upon the old smuggler's face was a look of agony, of thwarted hopes and dreams. "Careful, Toketie," he warned, "Don't jump at no hasty conclusions. Careful like now, Toketie."

"Hurry, Den," repeated Toketie nervously. "Belay on that *wawa*—hurry!"

Den turned, disappeared down the trail.

"A revenuer—gold-braider," half whispered Toketie, her gaze fastened upon her prisoner. "With lies he comes, that's how cunnin' he works—warms up the good, the love that's in a body, then—that's a gold-braider."

Lifting her trembling left hand, she wiped her lips savagely, brutally. "I'll wash them lips clean, with lye, ashes, if ever they can be clean again, that's felt a lyin' kiss. If I'd kissed a snake, it'd wash; but this—the bay's too shaller—the shore's too close—gold-braider."

Not a word answered Rolly, but looked into the eyes that glared into his with a hatred, an implacable fury appalling. Thus they stood, the big gun pressed against his breast while the clock ticked on its tardy seconds. A minute passed, two, three, ten. Then, as the rattling exhaust of the speed boat echoed along the hillside, Toketie dropped the weapon to the floor, flung herself into a chair, her body a quivering heap upon the table.

"Take me! Take me, gold-braider! I'm about your size of game! But you'll never get them. They're a mile to the line by now. Ketch 'em—never! Thank God!"

The revenuer leaned forward and placed his hand upon the girl's shoulder. Angrily she shook it away.

"Toketie," he said softly, "listen. Will you listen?"

"Don't talk to me! Don't!" she cried.

Without a further word, he stood by, watched the paroxysm of sobs that shook her slender body.

As Den walked rather slowly down the hill, he came presently in sight of Dave who was running back and forth insanely, waving to the old man to come on.

"They hain't no sweat," said Den composedly as he walked into the cabin clearing.

"Oh, come on, Den," moaned Dave. "He'll get us—sure. A year, I'd die, in the pen. Please come on, Den."

"Hain't you got no thought for Toketie?" demanded the old smuggler, the green eyes beginning to hide beneath lowering lids. "Hain't you?"

"She'll make out. She always has. I'd die, I'd die."

Old Den laid a heavy hand upon the boy's shoulder. "This here is lucky for Toketie, after all. You hain't no good, Dave, never was, never will be. You was laid on a rotten keel, and timbered scant. Maybe you can't help it. But I'm doin' some thinkin' about Toketie. This Rolly is a square rig, staunch, true, if he is a revenuer. In time, follerin' course, but for this squall, him and Toketie'd married. They hain't a doubt. Jerry fetchin' loose that hop label has give the matrimonial ship a sheer onto the rocks. She's got to be straightened out, that weddin' ship has. She's gotta."

The thieving Jerry, almost as badly terrified as Dave, came circling above them and alighted at the old man's feet. "Dum cuss you, Jerry!" exclaimed the smuggler, "I got a notion to strip your fur and fry you at a slow fire."

Again Dave made a frantic appeal. "Hold on," said Den angrily. "I'm thinkin'. It's a tough one. If they was a way for Toketie and him to make up, still he's got to make good; he's just got to ketch some one."

Like a mad man Dave struggled to free himself from the old man's grasp. "Oh, please, please," he pleaded, "let's go before it's too late."

"Don't you sweat; Toketie knows her job."

Still clutching the youth's arm, Old Den bent his head in deep perplexity. Jerry, hopping near, uttered a placating squawk.

"Come on, you Dave, and you, you dum cussed jay-bird, both of you."

The old man led Dave into the cabin, whither Jerry followed. Closing the window, lest Jerry take a sudden panic, Den searched forth a bit of paper and a stub of a pencil. Laboriously he wrote.

"Now this here," he explained to Dave, pointing to his effort, "is supposed to be a note that I've wrote when I find out you've grabbed my boat and beat off leavin' me in the lurch like you'd done, if you'd packed the sand. Toketie knows the holler tree where I and you leave word for each other, about fetchin' mail, supplies and so on. Toketie'll think Jerry stole this here note out of the post office tree. This here dockyment puts you in bad, Dave, where you belong. But that don't matter. You'll never come back. You read this note so you'll know I hain't lyin', then you take the speeder, and *klatawa* for all she'll turn up."

Dave read, started to remonstrate, rushed to the door a narrow margin ahead of a hearty kick, tore down the beach to the motor boat and was away.

Admiring his literary effort for an instant, Den folded it once across, placed it upon the table and opened the window. Then, as if engrossed in some weighty household task, he began moving about the room. Jerry, giving his discoverer and trainer a covert look from one bead of an eye, seized the note and flew through the window. Den thrust his head without and followed the direction of Jerry's flight.

"It worked, dum cussed if it didn't work," he said, slapping his knee with satisfaction.

Then Old Den seated himself, shaved a take of nigger-heel from a plug, filled his pipe and waited.

Still Rolly stood looking down at Toketie when Jerry landed in the window with an announcing "awk." The revenuer took the note from the creature's bill, opened it, read it.

"Toketie," said Rolly beseechingly, "look what Jerry brought. Read it. It's a note from Den to your brother. You don't want to read it? Listen; I'm going to read it to you:

"'Dave, you got a nerve to take my speed boat, beat out, and leave me holdin' the sack. You always was no good. I suggest if you ever do sneak back here, to sneak out again quick. You sister is one reason: I'm the other. You'd 'a' got grabbed long ago but for this Rolly party lovin' your sister, and him lovin' her like he done he didn't pack the sand to grab you account of her. But now it's all off between him and her. She can't pertect you no more. Me, when I cross up with you, you wharf rat, take a man's boat and leave him marooned on a little island with a gold-braider, why when you cross up with me, look out. I aim to just naturally strip all the rags offen your sticks and cave you in amidships, too. Bewair from yours truly, Den. P. S. I hope they get you in the draft.'"

Toketie lifted her head, took the note from Rolly's hand, read it through. Then she fell to gazing through the window, gently putting away with one hand the strutting Jerry who sidled up as if requesting her to observe what he had done.

"Is that—in the note—Rolly—was that the reason?"

The revenuer nodded. He was very close to her now. One hand was on the back of her chair.

"I," stammered Toketie, "I—" Her eyes fell upon the the remains of the forsaken feast. "Gosh, Rolly, we'd better finish our pie. Mr. What's-his-name—Hoover—mightn't like it, if we don't."

TRIBULATION AND CALAMITY

By AUGUSTIN W. BREEDEN

For action and dramatic possibilities the Klondike gold rush is mild in comparison to the stampede which takes place in the Ozark hills when a local millionaire goes the way of all flesh.

ONEST Henry Honeycutt leaned far back in his swivel chair, crossed his feet in a litter of papers and checker men, and gazed meditatively at a dust covered map of Missouri on the wall of his little real estate office.

"Was you ever down in them hills next to the Arkansas line?" he asked me. I confessed that I had never been down there, and he went on:

"I done the only stroke of big business I ever done in my life down in there. Ever hear of old Harmon Bradley?"

I believed I had, just to humor him on to spin his yarn.

"Well, it was following his sudden demise that the thing took place. That was eleven years ago. One wintry March day I was going home to dinner from the grocery store where I had spent the morning playing checkers, and as I was passing in front of this office the wind commenced to blow so strong that I backed in the doorway here to keep from being blowed into the street, which was about a foot and a half deep in mud. My father and my Uncle Bill run this shop in those days, but neither of 'em was ever here much, my old man being mostly at his store and Uncle Bill down about the wagon yard swapping lies and horses. Well, as I was stepping back onto the plank walk up rushed a wild-eyed, battered and bewhiskered individual, and says he: 'Do you run this real estate office?'

"I saw in a minute that here was a chance to relieve the ongwee, which is the curse of such burgs as this, and says I, 'I do.'

"'I have a proposition,' says he.

"'I was just starting home to dinner,' I batted back. 'If you'll come back after dinner one of my clerks will talk to you. By the way, Honeycutt is my name. What's yours?'

"'Botts is mine,' he admits. 'But listen, Mr. Honeycutt, this business is urgent; and besides it is a confidential matter. I don't want to talk to no clerks; I want to talk to you.'

"'All right,' I agreed, 'if you want to talk to me as I walk along to dinner, come along.'

"We started down the street yonder toward my old man's rendevoo and Botts begins to make his spiel. At first I thought he was just plain crazy; but as he talked on I decided he was a second rate con artist with a big phony proposition up his sleeve. He said he'd been running some sort of business in a little office on the twenty-first floor of a Chicago skyscraper. As near as I could make out what his business was from his testimonials, he was secretary for some sort of crazy society for the prevention of something or other. And he said that three mornings before as he was climbing the nineteenth flight of stairs, because the elevator didn't run as high as his office except when it had two-bit rubberneck passengers for the roof, he paused to blow in front of a certain office door and heard voices inside.

"The voices emanated from two grand swamis of high finance. One was H. H. Talbot, the best succession lawyer west of New York, and the other was old Hiram Gibbs of this little burg of Drayton, Missouri, a man whose name often figured in the hotel arrivals of New York and Chicago on account of a million and a half. Old Gibbs is a trifle deaf and they were

both talking loud. Well, the upshot of what they said, as Botts reported it to me, was that a certain old geezer many times a millionaire was dead there in the city. Harmon Bradley his name was, and he had three relatives down there in the Ozark hills—one Milt, one Bob, and one Buck Bradley. Botts understood that these three tater-grabblers was to receive about a half million each. He said he also secured their post office address, but he declined to put me onto that.

"By the time that specimen had reached this point in his narrative I was beginning to sit up and rub my peepers, but I was careful not to let him notice it. His mentioning our local millionaire was all the proof I wanted that the thing was gilt-edge. I knew old Gibbs was in Chicago on some sort of business at that time. Botts's proposition was for me to go in with him and put up some good farms and the like to swap to those flint-crushers for a half interest in their fortune before they had time to find out how big the fortune really was.

"'Come home and take dinner with me,' I said. 'Meantime I'll verify your story before wasting any more time on it. Also I guess you wouldn't object to a clean shirt and collar, a hot tub and a shave. Those cattle trains out of Chicago are pretty cold riding now, aren't they?'

"While I was speaking I ushered him into the house and shoved him gently into the bathroom. I could see plain enough that he was impressed with his surroundings. My old man's house is one that is featured on the post cards of this town. But Dad happened to be out of town that day and I decided I would play the man of the house. I knew Mother was too good a sport to give me away; and I managed to whisper to her that my party was about to employ me in a big succession matter, but that we could not talk business in her presence and that if I put on some airs before him she must not show surprise.

"While he was dressing for dinner I got a back number of the Kansas City Star and learned from it that one Harmon Bradley, a millionaire, had recently died in Chicago. Then during dinner, which was manna in the desert, and a godsend, and the philanthropic ravens to my famished promoter, I asked Mother casually: 'Mother, do you know any Bradleys down in the hills?'

"She studied a little, then she said: 'Yes, there's a family of Bradleys living down about Tribulation Cross Roads. There's a Milton Bradley runs a store down there.' Mother had taught school all about in those parts before she fell for the princely charms of pater.

"'Is this Tribulation Cross Roads much of a town?' asked Botts, as excited as a 'possum dog.

"'No, it isn't,' I answered. 'It's a place where hill billies foregather of Saturdays to pitch horseshoes and swap lies. The only thing you can buy there is Battle Axe tobacco and Arm and Hammer soda. And right across the road from the store is a blacksmith shop with a mud hole out just in front of it and a last year's circus poster sticking to the side. I've never seen the place. Have I described it, Mother?'

"'Yes, that's the way it looked the last time I saw it,' she said.

"I could see from Botts's face that we had located the Bradley family tree right enough. 'Mr. Botts,' I said after dinner, 'you stay right here and I'll run down to the office and get all the necessary papers and also have a team sent round from the stable.'

"I hurried down to my father's store, picked up a few official looking papers out of the waste basket, and then trotted over to my uncle's livery stable. My colored friend, Uncle Neal, was there in charge. He had been one of our family servants when I was a lad growing up and would do anything on earth for me.

"'Uncle Neal,' I said, 'get me out two horses, one that will saddle and one that won't saddle under any circumstances whatever and won't allow a man on its back; hitch 'em to a good strong buggy for me and slip me a saddle and blanket and a good buggy wrench under the seat.'

"'Now lookee heah, Mistah Henry,' says old Uncle Neal, 'yo' bettah not be up to

any ob yo' tricks, kase when de gov'nah gits home he's gwine to raise old Sam wid yo'.'

"'Never you worry, Uncle Neal,' says I. 'The governor ain't going to worry about this deal. I'm playing the good Samaritan this time; I'm guarding three little lambs to keep them from being eaten by a hairy old wolf right out of the jungles of Chicago.'

"I started to drive the team around to the house myself, but met Botts on the public square. The idiot was inquiring the way to Tribulation Cross Roads as I pulled up and no telling how much of his business he had given away.

"'Never mind about Tribulation, Uncle Johnny,' I said in order to put the crowd on the wrong trail, 'we won't want to go there till about the first of May when the trout begin to strike. Jump in now, for we'll have to drive to beat the band if we get to Unionville, Kansas, by to-morrow noon.'

"And so, because of that fool's four-flushing, I had to drive out of town north on the Unionville road instead of due south toward Tribulation. By five o'clock that windy afternoon we had made a wide circuit and were perhaps fifteen miles from Drayton. Say, but those roads were fierce. They had froze and thawed, froze and thawed till there wasn't any bottom to 'em. About half past five we stopped near a farm house on a hill, and I sent Botts up to ask if we could get lodging for the night with hot supper served in our rooms and private baths for two. He saw nothing queer about my request and trotted cheerfully off; and while he was gone to the house I unscrewed the tap from the left hind buggy wheel and dropped it into my overcoat pocket. Botts came back in about five minutes just snorting and said that the man of the house had insulted him.

"'Very well,' says I, 'there's plenty of other houses along here, and I suspect we'd better keep driving anyway as long as we can see.'

"We drove on for about half a mile and then the wheel came off. Botts was exasperated. All the way out from Drayton he had talked like a phonograph about the way we were going to swindle those poor Bradleys, and all the way out he had kept murmuring 'Tribulation,' sort of tasting the word, I thought, and he was completely torn up over this unforseen accident. We walked back over the road as far as the house where we had stopped, and then when it was too dark to have found the tap even if it had not been in my pocket, we gave up the search and returned to the buggy.

"I saddled the mean horse and told Botts to mount him, saying that I would ride the other one bareback. Botts mounted all right—he climbed up on a plank fence and crawled on like a fat drummer crawling into an upper berth. Then he suddenly began to pick himself up out of the mud.

"'Try again,' I encouraged. 'You touched him in the flank with your left hind foot; that's what caused him to pitch. Be more careful next time.'

"Say, that gazabo was game. If he crawled up on that steed's back once he crawled up a half dozen times; and every time, the next thing he did was to gather himself up out of the mud. Finally I took pity on him and told him to wait there in the road while I put the saddle on the other horse and went on to the next house to see if I could hire another buggy. And there in the dusk I left him and rode on toward Tribulation Cross Roads.

"I rode all night, rode hard and reached Tribulation, chilled to the bone, about an hour after sunrise next morning. Sure enough there was a Milt Bradley there running a store, and his daughter Nancy, an apple-cheeked, starry-eyed, cherry-lipped girl, was running the post office. That girl sort of took my eye from the start. I introduced myself to the old man and then started in by making him remember my mother. When we had got on pretty good terms I asked him if he would pay me a reasonable commission if I proved to him that he was going to fall heir to a large sum of money and protected him against sharks in the matter. He said he would, and I started in from the first and told him honestly all I knew about the matter.

"'Look here, youngster,' he said as soon as I got through, 'you git me a hundred thousand dollars of this money an' I'll give you fifty thousand cold cash.'

"'All right,' says I, 'write that up in the form of a contract.'

"We had just got the contract signed, with Miss Applecheeks for a witness, when things began to happen. First came a man on a mule, my old friend Homer Stotts, a noted horse swapper and liar, but worth a little money in farm land. He rode up casually.

"'Don't make no trade with nobody without my advice,' I whispered, 'and let the other feller do all the talkin'.'

"'You two git in the ware room thar an' keep yore ears to the cracks in the do',' he commanded; and I found myself in a low shed room full o' plow points and salt pork, in close proximity with the healthiest, prettiest, rosiest country Jane I ever was near to.

"Say, but that Homer Stotts was an artist. He told an average of one lie to the sentence and he never once got his wires crossed. According to the way he misrepresented it, the Bradleys of Missouri weren't even mentioned in the dead man's will and the case would have to be worked up from the stump. His proposition was to work it up on the halves. But Bradley followed my advice and set fast, and when Stotts urged him to give him an answer, he told him he'd have to have an hour or two to think about it.

"While those two was talking a surrey drove up to the store. It was loaded with the crookedest law firm in Drayton here—Mayfield, Murray and Sharp. How had the news got out? Evidently my friend Botts had leaked like a street sprinkler from the minute he arrived in Drayton. Those fellows had hired a team to take 'em from Drayton to the railroad, took a train to Southwest City, and then drove out to Tribulation. They helloed and inquired the way to the county seat. Bradley told them the way, and then they started a squabble among themselves. Judge Mayfield and Tom Sharp pretended that they had to go on to the county seat to attend court, and Jack Murray pretended just as hard that he had to go back to Southwest City. And meanwhile, oh sweet thought, Applecheeks and I were doddling our heads together over one crack in the sliding door of the ware room. Finally those three parted company and Murray dropped into the store to ask if he could hire a team to take him back to the railroad. I couldn't see his face for Cherrylip's fragrant auburn hair, but I know it looked like Black Friday when he ran onto old Homer Stotts in there. But he was game for the fight.

"'Bradley, Bradley,' he kept saying to himself when he had learned the storekeeper's name. 'Bradley, Bradlee? Where have I heard that name recently? Oh, yes, I remember now; a fellow of that name died in Chicago last week and left about a hundred thousand dollars. Do you supposed he was any kin of yours? They say he had oodles of relatives.'

"'Well naow, he mought 'a' been,' says Miss Pearly-teeth's father. 'Most o' the Bradleys ez I ever heared of was kin.'

"'Listen here, Mr. Bradley,' says Murray, 'suppose I should tell you that old Harmon Bradley's death entitled you to a neat little sum, say, twenty thousand dollars, and I was to protect you from sharpers so you could get it? Would you give me half of what you got?'

"'Suppose,' answered the wise hill billie, 'suppose you say: "Mr. Bradley, that head o' cheese thar's your'n; don't let no sharpers toll it off wi' them." D'ye reckon I'd give you half the cheese for the information and advice?' At this Miss Cherrylips has to stuff her little handkerchief in her mouth to keep from giggling out. 'Er suppose you say: "Uncle Milt, that's a fine lookin' darter you got; don't let no low-down ornery cuss come along an' marry 'er." D'ye reckon I'd tell 'er to run and jump the broom for you jest for telling me what I already knowed?'

"At this Miss Starry-eyes looks at me sort o' shocked and then looks down and blushes the color of a Kansas sunset. And presently them two crooks in there has acknowledged to knowin' one another and started in biddin' agin each other for a half share in that fortune.

"'I'll give you a hundred and sixty acres o' land a mile from the town of Drayton for a half interest in your share!' shouts Stotts.

"'I'll give you five good business lots in Drayton and a twenty room brick hotel!' bids Murray.

"'An' two residence lots in Drayton,' says Stotts.

"'An' a good dairy farm near Marionville,' antes Murray.

"'I'll add two good mule teams, a wagon, a surrey, an' a cow an' calf!' shouts Stotts.

"'Hadn't you better throw in a churn and dasher fer good measure?' drawls Milt Badley.

"'An' a churn an' dasher,' adds Homer Stotts, not seeing the irony of the joke.

"'I'll add twenty thousand one dollar shares of Jack City mining stock!' shouts Jack Murray. 'You understand, Mr. Bradley, I'm trading for the firm of Mayfield, Murray and Sharp.'

"'Wait a minute,' drawls Milt Bradley. 'Let's see if I onderstand jest what you fellers are tradin' for.'

"'For a quitclaim right in half of your interest in the Harmon Bradley estate,' says Murray, and Homer adds, 'That's right.'

Just then the trade was broken into temporary by the mad galloping of a horse and the shouts of his rider.

"'Whoa, you long-haired, raw-boned, high-headed son of Beelzebub!' shouted a voice that I thought I recognized. 'Whoa! If I pull off this deal I'll wrap you in five dollar bills and burn you alive!'

"Cherrylips and I tiptoed to the sliding door at the front, and there, coming madly down the road bareback on that pitchin' bronk of Uncle Bill's, was my old friend Botts. His hat was gone, his collar and cuffs were hanging by a button apiece, and he was so literally covered with mud from head to foot that you might have took 'im for the fust man, the one God Almighty made out o' dirt. He had evidently rode that mean hoss from the place I left 'im in the road, and it's a safe bet he'd had to pick himself up on an average of once or twice to the mile. As he come in front of the store he commenced hauling in the left bridle rein as you haul in on a towline an' the old hoss turned sidewise and come to such a sudden halt that he rolled off in the biggest mud hole in Tribulation. 'That's right, you old he-devil,' he grunted, 'buck me off once more for good measure!'

"Miss Applecheeks had her handkerchief stuffed in her mouth again.

"'That's him, isn't it?' she tittered.

"'That's him,' I asseverated.

"He scrambled up the steps and into the store and begin to spiel: 'This Mr. Milton Bradley? Botts is my name. I'm from Chicago and I've come to announce to you that you've got a good-sized fortune coming to you from the Harmon Bradley estate. Now if I protect you from sharpers and help you get it, will you give me half?'

"'Look here, Mister,' says Milt, and spit a long stream of hillside navy, 'you're about the fourteenth man that's come here this morning and offered to protect m from sharpers on the halves. Ef you want half of my fortune you'll have to bid for it the same as these two.'

"'I'll give you—I'll give you,' shouts Botts; but he can't think what he'll give, because I'm not there to sidekick for him with my farms and things. 'I'll give you a check for seventy-five thousand, good the day the estate is settled and you get your share.'

"'Don't listen to the old whiskers,' warns Homer Stotts. 'You heard my offer.'

"'And you heard mine!' shouts Murray. 'I'm backed by the firm of Mayfield, Murray and Sharp.'

"'And a good seven passenger touring car that can be put into shape with very little repairing,' antes the mud god.

"'I'll trade with you, and you,' drawls Milt, pointing first at Murray and then at Stotts. 'I'll call my wife for a witness and we can jest make a verbal trade.'

"At that there is a tremendous pounding on the front door, but Botts has pulled the latchstring inside, maybe thinking I was yet to come. I could see Mayfield and Sharp trying their best to get in, and hear 'em calling, 'Murray, hey Murray.' But that Chicago con artist is making so much

noise that Murray in the excitement don't hear 'em. When I see that Miss Applecheek's father is about to trade off his birthright for a pot o' message, as you might say, I starts to butt in, but Applecheeks holds me back, and so the trade is made.

"And then Applecheeks catches me by both arms and begins to steer me toward the back door of the ware room, and I make a solemn resolution that if old Bradley heirs a big fortune or if he don't I'm going to have a throw for that girl. 'Come, hurry, Mr.— Mr. Honeycutt,' she whispers. 'Run to the house and bring me a kettle o' hot water.'

"I run like the wind, although I hadn't the least idea what she wanted with the hot water; I remember now I had a vague sort of notion that she was going to kill hogs. When I got back I found the girl in a little shed that served for a garage. She grabbed the kettle from my hand and began playing a stream of hot water on the vital organs of a tin lizard. 'Crank,' she panted, 'crank while I pour.'

"Directly the thing came to life. 'Jump in,' she ordered, and I jumped. I'd have jumped just as quick at her word if I'd been standing on the rim of a live volcano. We sped out around back of the store to get into the big road, and just then we heard the awfullest row inside the store that ever broke loose since the original bedlam. Mayfield and Sharp had got in at last and they were evidently bawling somebody out, and three other men were yelling like fury. What came through to me sounded something like: 'Fool! Fool—' 'We've traded.' 'Got no—' 'Where's Buck Bradley?' 'Calamity—Calamity, not Tribulation—' 'You're a liar. Show me; I'm from Missouri!'

"Miss Applecheeks was laughing now at the top of her voice, a sweet trilling laughter; and just as we swung into the big road in front of the store, going at top speed, old Botts made a dash at us, shouting, 'Calamity—Calamity!' He just touched a back fender, spun round once or twice, and rolled into his favorite mud hole. Just then we heard the honk, honk of another car, and I slewed round in my place and saw a big roadster coming over the rise.

"'We'll have to stay ahead of them and lead 'em into the wrong road,' chirped Auburn-hair and opened her feed wide open.

"'Road to where?' I made inquiry.

"'Road to Calamity,' she made answer. 'Please don't talk to the man at the throttle.'

"'It'll be a calamity right here in this road if you don't choke her off a little,' I shook out. But she only smiled at me with her starry eyes and bent low over the wheel.

"Crossing the Coon River bottoms the big roadster gained on us and finally passed us, but the ferryman on Coon waited for us and put the two cars over together. Old Hiram Gibbs and a gilt-edged looking city man and a Southwest City chauffeur were in the car. None of us got out of the cars while crossing. I leaned over and whispered to Cherrylips, while the others eyed us suspiciously, 'Honest to goodness, where are we headed for?'

"'Calamity.'

"'We've barely escaped it a dozen times in the last half hour,' I said.

"'We'll beat 'em to it yet,' she laughed, as she threw in her clutch and bounded off the boat a bare ten feet behind the roadster. We had some weed chain trouble and for the next three or four miles saw very little of the other crowd, and then on a hill that was so straight it leaned back a little, we came up to them, with a dead engine and the big car set straight across the road. There wasn't a chance for us to pass.

"'What's the matter?' called Pearly-teeth sweetly.

"'Gas too low in the tank, Miss; won't feed up into the engine,' complained the chauffeur, and then: 'Say, if you'll lend me enough gas to get me up the hill I'll pay you back and some to spare when we're on the level.'

"'Ever hear the story of the fox and the billy goat that fell in the pit together?' asked Cherrylips tauntingly.

"'No, how's it go?'

"'Well, the one that got out first forgot

to go back and help the other one out,' she flung at him, and with that she eased her little car back down the grade and turned off into a sort of cow trail and we sped away. Twice in the next hour we had to get out and pull cedar tops and grape vines out of the running gear, and twice she had to put 'er on high and jump gullies because we hadn't time to stop and fill 'em with logs and brush. And after a time we came to a hill that was a hill. Applecheeks poked the nose of the lizard a little way up, and the fire under the hood flickered and went out. 'Same trouble as theirs,' she chirped, 'gas so low it won't feed up to the engine.'

"'What do we do in a case like this?' I asked Sugarlips.

"'Use our heads like they didn't,' she replied sweetly, and she let the car roll back to the level, turned it around and backed it up the hill a quarter of a mile high. Then there was another level and then we backed up another long hill. Then there was another level and then more backing to do, up and up and then some. When we came out at the top, where nothing could grow but juniper and cactus, we could see for twenty miles across Coon River bottoms. It was a sightly place and the wind blew as if it was the turning of the world dragging against the outer space.

"In a little cove two hundred yards below us was a one-pen cabin and a rail-fenced deadening that was about the shape of a map of Texas, and sitting on the rail fence in front of the cabin was Old Father Time, or so I judged him to be from his general appearance.

"'Hello, Uncle Milt!' called Starry-eyes as we climbed down to the cabin. 'Reckon Uncle Bob and Uncle Buck's at home?'

"'Arkinsaw, Nance,' drawled Father Time as he unfolded his long legs and climbed down from the fence.

"'Blow 'em up, Uncle Milt,' commanded Applecheeks. 'We've got business that is mighty important.' The old man took up a great crinkly ram's horn, buried it in his whiskers, and blew a blast. When he done that he made me think o' the Angel Gabe a-blowin' the trump o' doom. He blowed three times.

"'Uncle Milt, you reckon you-all are any kin to old Harmon Bradley, the millionaire?'

"'Arkinsaw, Nance; most all the Bradley's I ever see war kin, excusin' yore paw an' his people.' I began faintly to see light. Presently up across that forty-five degree farm came two more bewhiskered patriarchs. 'Those are Bob and Buck Bradley,' explained the girl. 'Tell 'em your story like you told it to Father.'

"I told 'em all I knew and asked 'em for ten thousand apiece if they found my information correct and got the money. They all seemed kind o' bewildered at first, but presently Bob Bradley said: 'Pap'll know.'

"'Arkinsaw, Bob,' trumpeted old Milt.

"We all went into the cabin, and there sitting before the fire was the greatgrandfather of Methuselah. He was stone blind, deaf as a hitching post, and hadn't walked a step for fifteen years, but his attic seemed to be in a fine state of repair.

"'Pap! Oh, Pa-ap!' trumpeted old Milt. 'Here's little Nance what used to teach school yere. Tribulation Milt's little gal!'

"'E-eh?'

"'Tribulation Milt Bradley's gal.'

"'Yeh, I ben studyin', ben studyin' five year to try to figger out ef Tribulation Milt ain't some kin of our'n. Cain't see how 'e could be a Bradley and not be kinfolks.'

"'Pap! Say Pa-ap! Whose boy was Harmon Bradley?'

"'E-eh?'

"'Harmon Bradley! Whose boy was he?'

"'Hiram Bradley? Sanctified Hi, you mean?'

"'No-o! I said Harmon Bradley! Harr! Mann! Harmon Bradley!'

"The oracle was silent in the manner of all oracles except the Stone County Oracle. Finally it spoke: 'They was two Harm Bradleys. One was kilt in '67 in a still house fight daown on the Jeemes.'

"'T'other'n, Pap! Whose boy was t'other'n?'

"'He was ole Sid Bradley's boy. He run off wi' the Red Leggers and last I

heered o' him he was gittin' rich in Kansas City.'

"'Was you an' Sid any kin?'

"'E-eh!'

"'Any kin-n! You an' Si-id?'

"'Arkinsaw, Milt, arkinsaw. We's fust cousins. Sid was Uncle Bije's boy by his fust wife.'

"Just then we heard a noise in the road above us. 'Here, put your crosses to this paper if you want that fortune,' spoke up Applecheeks. While the patriarchs had been talking she had been busy writing, and the thing she had written was a contract whereby they agreed to pay me ten thousand dollars apiece in case they heired money from the Harmon Bradley estate. There were no provisos to the contract, except that she and I were to furnish them with such information as we could and do what we could to help them secure the money. The three made their marks with her for a witness, and she handed me the paper with a little flourish. I had made up my mind by that time to propose to her on our way home and drown myself in Coon River if she didn't accept me.

"By this time the cause of the noise above was visible. 'Whoa haw, Broad! Whoa haw, Jerry!' I looked out at the cabin door and saw old Hiram Gibbs and that other grand swami sitting very dignified in a big roadster. And Simm Knull, the still house man, had rigged a pole to the front axle and was pulling them slowly along with his old oxen, making about two hours a mile, and that chauffeur was still at the wheel looking as sour as if he'd eaten a barrel of dill pickles.

"There wasn't anything crooked about the deal Gibbs and his partner was on. All they wanted was proof that these were the real Bradleys, and Cherrylips and I soon had the grandfather of Methuselah talking under oath, securing 'em the dope they wanted. And presently the road was full o' people. It looked like a primary. First here come Homer Stotts muleback, then Cherrylip's father hossback, and then that surrey load of Mayfield, Murray and Sharp, and then about a dozen others, some from Drayton and some from Southwest City and some from the county seat; and last of all, afoot, weary and wayworn, comes old Botts. 'Which way is it to Calamity Cross Roads?' he asks of the assembled company, not knowing he had arrove at his destination.

"'Just over the mountain about half a mile is the post office of that name,' answered Cherrylips sweetly.

"'Where's your hoss? Have you burnt 'im in five dollar Williams yet?' I makes inquiry; and at that he went ravin' mad.

"Well, to make a long story short, those three patriarchs got theirs, I got mine, and Tribulation Milt Bradley got his from Homer Stotts and Mayfield, Murray and Sharp. He held 'em for ten per cent forfeit money, and could 'a' got more, but he got to feeling sorry for that bunch o' crooks. Yes, I married Applecheeks; that was her passed here in the big touring car a while ago; she's got a dairy farm out at Crystal Springs—you know the Crystal Springs Brand o' butter? That's hers.

"What did those patriarchs do with their money? Spent most of it in riotous living—passed some of it on for their heirs and assigns to spend likewise."

Honest Henry Honeycutt took his number tens down from the litter of papers and checker men, and I relighted my cigar, which had long since gone out.

THE ONE WITNESS

By L. B. BIRDSALL

The absence of a parrot from its appointed place in a basement window marks the beginning of the most baffling case in the career of Police Sergeant McCully.

ERGEANT Timothy McCully, of the West Twentieth Patrol Station, in his four thousand and eighth ambulation along West Twenty-third Street, stopped for the four thousand and eighth time before the screen-covered front basement window of Mama Snider's dingy "Sailors' Lodging House" and softly whistled a few stirring bars of "The Wind That Rocks the Barley," peering down into the dimly lighted cellar the while. His melody floated off down the almost deserted street, while a pungent odor of garlic and stale cooking was all that emanated from the basement. He whistled again, louder this time and longer, with just a touch of impatience in the final note. He waited expectantly. The silence of the malodorous depths was unbroken. The sergeant leaned his broad, blue-clad back against the dirty brickwork of the building and rubbed his square chin. "Now I wonder where the divil me little friend Captain Pate is?" he pondered in unmistakable Hibernian. "The sassy ould bhoy has niver failed to answer me call before!"

Sergeant McCully, with a certain tinge of native curiosity mixing with his official duty, so far forgot his dignity as to bend almost double to peer into the cellar. In the half-light he could discern a scattered disarray of unwashed dishes. A grease-spattered alarm clock stared in open-faced silence at him from the opposite wall. His trained eye and ear noted that the timepiece had stopped at twenty-seven minutes past three. He looked at his watch. "Eight-forty-eight," he mused. "Mama Snider must be away; that clock stopped this morning." His hurried glance took in the other contents of the untidy room that served as a kitchen. The stove was littered with dirty pots and kettles. The door of the battered refrigerator in one corner gaped half-open, revealing a heterogeneous collection of scraps within. The table with its garish-colored, oil-cloth covering showed unmistakable signs that a meal had been hurriedly left half-eaten. A portion of a loaf of bread reposed amid its crumbs on a board near the plate, where some nondescript victuals still remained. A dish of melted butter and a pot of jam lay near the bread. Beside the table on the grimy kitchen floor a rickety chair was overturned, and near it, the sergeant made out a dim outline of a knife the diner had evidently dropped. Save for the innumerable flies that swarmed over everything the place was apparently deserted. The usually conspicuous and slatternly form of Mama Snider was absent. So also was the gay plumage and raucous voice of Captain Pete.

Captain Pete had always been the one bright spot in this dirty, foul-smelling kitchen. Perched on the windowledge he had daily drowsed beneath the few streaks of sunshine that found their way into his gloomy home, and scolded at tormenting flies or mischievous street urchins, who persistently tapped on the screen, rudely interrupting the captain's peaceful dreams of tropical forests.

Captain Pete was a magnificent parrot, possessed of an uncommonly lengthy vocabulary. He had been a seafaring gentleman in his youth, a roommate of the notorious old Captain Bob Skidder of the long-deceased four-master, Sea Nymph. Captain Bob had bought the parrot from a grinning native off the west coast of Madagascar on

one of his infrequent trading trips to that portion of the world and after several months coaxing and bribing with sugar had finally inculcated into the wise little green head a number of choice bits of sea language. From that time the bird's wisdom had increased daily.

His master had been in the habit of paying many visits to Mama Snider's shore retreat at the end of each long cruise. It was during one of these extended visits that Captain Bob suddenly gave up the ghost and his wizened old soul went on its last long cruise, one on which he couldn't take the beloved parrot. His death had come unexpectedly and save for a few hundred dollars in the savings bank, the sailor did not appear to have left many worldly possessions. It was a well known fact, though, that at one time the deceased Captain Bob had boasted of a fine collection of rare jewels which he had picked up in odd corners of the globe during his forty years steady cruising from one little-known port to another. Many believed that he had left this valuable portion of his estate to Mama Snider, although she had always maintained complete silence on the matter.

Members of the Sea Nymph's former crew had hinted that the Captain's collection of gems was a large and wonderful one and that several of the more costly had not come into his possession legitimately. There had been considerable mystery surrounding the captain's sea exploits, especially concerning those made in his younger days. Some claimed that he had carried on a mild buccaneering business in the South Sea Isles.

After a few days of shrieking and calling for his departed master, the parrot had quickly become accustomed to his new home and mistress. He had added to his already long list of rather indiscreet ocean-going talk, a number of choice terms and phrases that had met his receptive ears during a six years sojourn in the basement and sitting room of the Sailors' Lodging House; for, despite his abhorrence of flies and small but inimical boys, Captain Pete was a gregarious personage and delighted in waxing loquacious and blasphemous when a friendly passerby, who did not bear a glint of mischief in his or her eye, spoke to him.

Sergeant McCully was his most particular friend. During the months when the clemency of the weather permitted him to be at the window, he had greeted the officer twice daily and they had carried on a spirited conversation for five or ten minutes, broken only by an occasional throaty jungle call from the bird or a merry Irish chuckle from the policeman. During the winter months, the sergeant had been wont to drop into Mama Snider's front sittingroom, where the parrot fretted and hibernated, and spend a few minutes each day refreshing the bird's appetite with peanuts and his mind with some new slang word.

THAT half-eaten meal and overturned chair perplexed the sergeant as he arose from his hurried scrutiny of the kitchen. They bespoke haste, and haste was an action that connected itself in almost every instance with crime, from the sergeant's experience. The guilty conscience made use of it in flight from justice; the stealthy murderer in concealment. The chair in Mama Snider's kitchen had been overturned, undoubtedly by the corpulent proprietress herself, in undue haste. The knife on the floor showed clearly that the emotion of surprise had also attended the hasty departure from the table. His intuitive brain rapidly reviewed the correlating instances of neglect and disorder that had met his eye. The run down clock, the unwashed dishes, the open refrigerator and the absence of the parrot, all tended to arouse the officer's suspicions; and with suspicion came curiosity.

He raised his eyes and surveyed the upper windows. Save for the farthest one on the left side of the second story, every blind was tightly drawn. In this single exception, he noticed that a screen was inserted in the window and the blind half-raised.

The sergeant rubbed his square chin again. "Be Jabers, I'll just take a little look around inside," he decided aloud, and mounted the half dozen steps that led to

the front door, which swung open to his touch. The general lounging or sitting-room, as Mama termed it, which he entered was as deserted as the cellar-kitchen. In his rapid walk across the room he noticed that there were signs of haste and disorder here also. The drawer of the old-fashioned table in the centre of the room was out upon the table top and a quantity of papers were strewn around it and also on the floor. Across a chair he noticed a wrap of some description and on the dusty, faded couch in the corner a lady's hat.

He strode over to the door that opened upon the hall leading to a flight of stairs into the basement. Some involuntary impulse started him in that direction. His mind, when entering the building, had been on the room with the partly drawn blind. He hurried down the long hall to the door that opened upon the cellar steps. As he gained it, a noise above his head on the next floor arrested his attention. The place was not entirely deserted. Someone was walking slowly down the hall above. The sergeant resolved to wait. The steps sounded on the stairs, and in a few seconds he heard the inner door of the sitting-room open and close. He retraced his steps to that room and looked in upon a young man, apparently just awakened from the appearance of his eyes, who was making ready to issue forth upon the street. He eyed the sergeant with unfeigned surprise. The sergeant recognized him as one of the older lodgers in the house. He was a night-waiter in an uptown restaurant, which accounted for his sleepy appearance.

"Anything wrong?" he inquired of the sergeant and walked over to him.

"I don't know," answered the officer honestly. "There doesn't appear to be a large amount of loife in the basement and Oih was just about to be afther investigating."

The young man grinned good-naturedly. "That so? Isn't Mama around?" He walked out into the hall beside the policeman as he spoke and led the way toward the stair. "I'll go down with you, Sergeant, if you don't mind," he said. "I haven't much to do and I'll talk to Captain Pete a while if he is there."

"The little divil is away, too," answered the sergeant. "That's what aroused my suspicions."

As they descended the stairs the lodger was laughingly telling the sergeant that he would get into trouble with Mama Snider on account of the rude entry he had made. He swung through the door into the back portion of the basement that Mama used as a storeroom, chuckling over the sergeant's assurance that he would look after himself. He came out of the room again before the policeman gained the door. His face was ghastly. The mirth had entirely disappeared. In its place was wide-eyed horror.

"My God, Sergeant!" he gasped. "Look in there!"

The sergeant looked, and strong man as he was, accustomed to meeting gruesome sights, he recoiled to the door as the lodger had done.

There on a broken camp-cot in the middle of the floor lay the body of Mama Snider, the head turned toward the door and the eyes staring at them in the spine-tickling fixity of death. Around her throat was knotted a dirty towel, tied tightly, evidently for the purpose of strangling. Beside the body and near the head was a pail of discolored water and near it some blood-stained rags.

Directly over the remains of the murdered woman, suspended from a hook in the ceiling hung the cage containing the parrot, Captain Pete, who stared at the intruders as silently and as fixedly as his dead mistress. It was the bird that attracted the sergeant's attention. It seemed to be in a stupor, either from fright or hunger.

He walked over to the cage and spoke to the bird. There might have been the slightest twitch of recognition to the bright eyes, nothing else. The parrot seemed to be looking past him at something else, some unseen presence in the room. The sergeant felt an uncanny dread creeping over him but dismissed it with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "Poor little Captain Pate," he crooned, "you're all of too frightened to spake, aren't you?" He turned to the lodger who had remained in

the doorway, fright and horror still stamped on his features. "Watch here, me bhoy!" he commanded, "while I go and call headquarters."

"I'll 'phone them, Sergeant!" half-whispered the young man, and was off up the stairs as he spoke.

The sergeant did not recall him; he did not wish to. These few moments before the inevitable avalanche of detectives, medical examiners, and other officials arrived and took charge were just what he desired. Here was a mystery that stirred his ambitious Irish heart. It was his discovery, an unpleasant one he admitted, but nevertheless his. An inexplicable inner urging had brought him down here; why shouldn't he be entitled to the first investigation?

The paralytic surprise of his entrance upon the scene had entirely disappeared; in its place had come an ardent desire to avenge the poor, battered body on the cot, which had, but a few short hours before, been an inoffensive old soul, doing harm to no one. He quickly turned on the solitary incandescent that extended on a fly-covered cord from the ceiling. He took a large colored handkerchief from his pocket and covered the distorted features over which a swarm of the winged pests were also crawling. The air was full of them and he felt a slight nauseous wave go over him as it occurred to him that these germ carriers that were persistently lighting on his features and crawling around his mouth had no doubt recently been disporting themselves on the murdered woman. He brushed them away hurriedly, and commenced a busy inspection of the room.

The first object that attracted his attention was a heavy steel knife sharpener that lay near the foot of the cot. He picked it up gingerly and examined it. The murderer had evidently made use of it as a weapon. Near it lay a wooden wash stick, covered with blood and hair. He took it to the light and looked at the hairs closely. They had not belonged to the woman, but to a man; they were short and black. He carefully removed three or four of them and placed them between two leaves of a pocket memorandum.

The hairs showed that a fight must have occurred and the murderer had not escaped unscathed. He turned to the body, and for the first time noticed that the cruelly beaten head had been bandaged in a rough manner; the rude affair of colored calico had dropped off and lay partly under the cot, soaked in drying blood and swarming with more flies. The bandage and the pail of bloody water and rags puzzled him.

"Sure and I can't figure out a man bating someone nearly to dith, and thin to be afther playin' the nurse," he mused aloud. "It would be a moighty strange thing for a man to do, but how about a woman?" He had it; there had been three actors on the scene: Mama Snider, the man murderer and another woman who had endeavored to bring life back into the poor maltreated body. Why had the woman done this, and why had she not untied that towel which had certainly assisted in bringing about Mama's death? Had the woman been acting for the good and become frightened and left or what was the reason of these puzzling paradoxes? The mystery grew deeper every moment. He rose to his feet and pondered over the dead body. The presence of a third party was harder to solve than that of the burglar.

What a complicated affair it must have been! He visualized the three actors in this terrible affair. He placed the strange woman more in the role of a neutral, endeavoring to revive the lost breath of life after the male had wreaked his unbridled fury on poor Mama. It was a strange world this, full of strange people, and here was evidence of some exceptionally unusual actions.

He glanced at the parrot again. The little eyes were still fixed on that abstract object beyond him. That creepy, vague feeling of unseen danger again passed through the sergeant's frame.

"Me bhoy!" he addressed the bird commiserately, "I wish you could spake and unburthen that poor little—"

He turned and gazed in the direction the parrot's eyes were focused, a low ex-

clamation escaping his lips. He noticed for the first time that the door between the disorderly kitchen and the room he was in was closed, and he remembered distinctly that it had been half-open when he had peered down into the kitchen from the street!

He sprang forward and endeavored to open the door, but to no avail! It was locked and the key was gone! He glanced about the floor to make sure; but it was not to be seen! A noise overhead informed him that succor was approaching. He turned and ran out of the room and up the stairs, where he was met by a surge of incoming officers and men at the door.

"Go down stairs!" he yelled, dashing by them down the hall and out of the front door, part of the men following him, the remainder carrying out his peremptory order. Out to the basement window he rushed, where he had peered down a few minutes before, and started back in surprise. The screen had been removed and the window was now closed!

The murderer or some other person had been with the body of the dead woman while he was gazing into the kitchen! Whoever it was had been aware of his presence and had made this daring getaway by means of the stove and window ledge! No wonder the parrot had stared beyond him as if watching someone else in the room! There had been! Who had dared to come back in broad daylight and view the diabolical work? What was it had brought them back here; had they forgotten something or been unable to find some object that perhaps had caused the actual slaying? The prize in such a case must be great, that they would dare return and search for it! The mystery deepened every minute!

ALMOST two months passed and the mystery of the slaying of Mama Snider remained an unsolved riddle, despite the fact that the ablest sleuths in the vicinity had worked night and day on it. It was as if the earth had opened suddenly and swallowed the perpetrator of the dark deed. The round-up of the roomers had availed the police nothing; and, although a number of suspects had been held and been given gruelling examinations, they had been unable to learn anything that might lead to a clue.

Strangest of all, though, was the fact that, although the rooms formerly occupied by the murdered woman bore unmistakable signs of having been searched and ransacked, the searchers did not appear to have been looking for money, for, on top of a wardrobe in the front room, she had hidden what, in so poverty-ridden a place was wealth unaccountable, a dirty old sheepskin bag containing nearly $2000, mostly in bills of large denomination.

One thing that could not be located, and therefore furnished the only motive for the crime, was the fabulous wealth of rare gems Captain Bob Skidder was reputed to have bestowed upon Mama before his death. The police had thoroughly investigated hidden nooks and corners for the possible finding of the treasure, but had discovered nothing, nor evidence that the jewels had been found by someone else.

There were doubts in many minds, though, as to the actual existence of this fortune. Mama had always stoutly denied the report that she had become the heiress of this rather mythical collection, and had claimed the parrot, Captain Pete, was all the worldly possession her seafaring friend had left her.

A careful watch had been instituted in the hope that the person who had been in the room the morning Sergeant McCully made his discovery of the crime and had vanished through the cellar window, might return again; but without success. The person, male or female, had not returned.

From the apparent agility with which the visitor had escaped, the detectives were led to believe that he or she was small and nimble-limbed. If the visitor and the murderer were identical, then he had jet black hair of the hard bristly type found on the heads of Mongolians or the North American Indians.

Another strange feature of the murder was the manner in which the towel had been knotted about the victim's neck. It had been tied tightly over the windpipe by an expert and a devil, for the knot was

an intricate affair that hinted at previous knowledge and long practise in this diabolical mode of killing.

The medical examiners declared that the actual death had been caused by the victim being choked and not from the numerous bruises on the head which were really only skin wounds. Also the attempt to render first aid had been made before the throttling, the profusion of blood on the floor and bandages attesting to this fact. This was the most baffling part of the whole thing, this apparent exertion to render assistance to the stricken woman to be followed by the choking. Why had this assistance been given and by whom? The presence of a third party and a female seemed assured.

Sergeant McCully had been convinced of this from the beginning. He mused over it one cool evening in September seated at his desk, endeavoring to awaken some interest in the eyes of the huge parrot that blinked dully from a cage in front of him.

"Poor Captain Pate!" he spoke softly to the moping bird, "your little, green-kivered heart was broke, wasn't it, me bhoy?" He offered the parrot a tempting biscuit which it ignored entirely. "Poor bhoy, poor bhoy!" he reiterated, "I wish you'd be afther talkin' again; I'd loike to be havin' you swear at me, even though I'll confiss it is profane language."

He gave up the task of endeavoring to arouse the bird from its lethargy. It seemed almost as hopeless an undertaking to renew this parrot's garrulous tongue as it did to solve the mystery surrounding the murder of his mistress.

He had confiscated Captain Pete after numerous advertisements had revealed a total absence of heirs to the poor woman, and hanging the cage over his desk he had daily talked to, swore at or coaxed the bird with dainty tit-bits, all in a vain attemps to loosen that raucous voice again. He reviewed in his mind the incidents leading to the finding of the body and afterwards. He had worked like a slave with the detectives, forgetting to take the hours of rest that he was entitled to in his zeal and desire to locate some clue. He was tired to-night both physically and mentally, and he dropped off into a doze, dreaming of sparkling jewels and dark cellars.

A scuffle in the outer room aroused him. "The bhoys must have captured something," he surmised and awaited their approach.

The door opened and two officers entered dragging with them a struggling male prisoner. The minions of the law shoved him forward with an extra heave, and the sergeant surveyed a sullen faced little man whose one distinguishing mark was a huge livid scar stretching from the left corner of his mouth to the ear, and giving that side of his face an appearance of extreme ferocity. His complexion was dark and colorless, and his eyes, set wide apart, were slanted slightly like an Oriental's. His hair—the sergeant noticed the wisps revealed under the edges of his hat—was very black and straight. A stubble of equally black beard covered his truculent chin. His figure was slight but rigidly built; the legs noticeably bowed and the arms abnormally long. He looked very much like a mongrel dog, the sergeant thought as he viewed the man, the result of a forbidden mixture of contrasting races.

"I found this fellow snoopin' around Mama Snider's old place," explained one of the policemen, holding his reluctant prize out toward the sergeant. "The little runt can fight like blazes, too," he continued, nursing his face. "He scratched my cheek and bit—"

The officer stopped in his speech and stared in open-mouthed astonishment at something behind the sergeant. "Look at that parrot!" he whispered.

Sergeant McCully wheeled at his words. The parrot had undergone a magical change! No longer were its eyes dull and lifeless! They were twinkling like little jets of flame—burning, staring, watching the man the officers had brought in, who in turn stared as intently at the bird!

The sergeant felt a cold, creepy wave pass over him. The parrot was focusing its beady eyes on the man's in the same fixed way as it had looked into space the

morning when he had entered the room where its dead mistress lay.

The face of the prisoner had also changed considerably. The sullen look had been replaced by one of keen anxiety. His mouth was partly opened, revealing two firm rows of savage teeth and he was breathing heavily, as with tense excitement. His hands worked convulsively.

For one of those interminable spaces of time silence reigned in the room. It lasted perhaps less than one minute, yet it seemed an age. Then it was broken and from an unexpected quarter.

From the throat of the parrot came a scream, weird and exotic. It was the danger call of the native forests, learned years before the hand and tongue of man had cast a thin veil of civilization over the little mind.

It crouched in one corner of the cage, a mass of ruffled feathers, and screamed again; then, like a pent-up dam bursting its bounds, it shrieked forth a torrent of distorted speech, sea-curses and harsh, inarticulate cries.

"Scarface, you devil!—Don't kill me!—Don't kill me!—Mercy!— Scarface!—Not here! Not here—You liar, liar!—Avast! —Poor Ma-ma!—Poor Ma-ma!—Captain Bob!—Ark-k-k-k—"

The raucous voice floated off in a medley of curses and harsh calls. The bird was clutching the wires of the cage, its fierce eyes on the cringing prisoner. The scar on his face burned red like an angry, open wound. He watched the frenzied bird with terrified eyes.

The sergeant inadvertently crossed himself devoutly. The two patrolmen, gazing in consternation at the maniacal parrot, relaxed their hold of the captive for a second. With the quickness of a shadow he ducked out of their reach and ran through the door, slamming it shut in their faces.

"Get that man, for God's sake!" shouted the sergeant, racing to the door. It was locked! He made a frenzied football rush at the portal with his big shoulder used as a ram. The frame splintered and shook with the force. Another onslaught and it was open.

He gave a sigh of relief! An officer was entering the outer door, belaboring the runaway, who was fighting like a wild beast for his freedom. "He ran straight into my arms," explained the officer as the sergeant sprang to his assistance.

Inside, the parrot had broken forth in another wild stretch of disjointed phrases and sentences: "Scarface!—Bury it deep! Bury it deep!—Don't kill me!—Don't kill me!—Poor Ma-ma—"

One hour later, after being closeted with three merciless third-degree men, Scarface Dillon, as the prisoner gave his name, had lost control of his badly shaken nerves and confessed to the murdering of Mama Snider. The tale he told was a harrowing one, revealing a mind void of the least semblance of humanity. His only regret was that he had not killed the damned parrot.

His mother had been a Chinese immigrant and his father a drunken American sailor, who had passed his shore leave in Chinatown, San Francisco. For this place, in his story, Dillon expressed an unconcealed hatred. It was because of this aversion, that at the age of twelve, he had run away from his uncongenial home, one spring morning, and sailed out of the harbor with Captain Bob Skidder in the Sea Nymph as a cabin boy. He had grown into manhood and middle age with this old tyrant, serving in the capacity of cook, ship's doctor, and general handyman. Growing up with the captain and his unholy crew, each succeeding year he had become more lawless and depraved.

He told of the life on the ship and of the cruelty of the captain. The great, disfiguring scar on his face from which he had derived his cognomen, was the brand Captain Bob had given him years before in a drunken mood, when the food he had cooked had not suited the enraged captain's taste. His face had been laid open with a cutlass, and he had lain for weeks between life and death, without medical aid or care of any kind.

Under inquisitors' unrelentless searching, he divulged sketches of the captain's nefarious explorations in faraway and un-

charted seas, that savored at times of unbridled piracy. He spoke of the huge pile of plunder the captain had collected and had buried one night on a lone island far out in the Pacific. Captain Skidder, being the only one on board capable of charting, had retained a single map of the island, letting no one see it.

It was for the locating of this map that Dillon had entered Mama Snider's lodging house. He had heard the rumors that Captain Bob had entrusted her with his fortune, and knowing that if this were so she must possess the chart, he had surprised her at her evening meal in the kitchen and knocked her into insensibility before she could scream or call for help. He had removed the parrot from the window and had brought it into the inner room also, fearing the wisdom of the bird with which he had become well acquainted on shipboard.

His hurried search through drawers and cupboards had failed to reveal the hiding place of the coveted paper. Despairing of finding it he had gone back to the cellar and revived the mistress with the application of water and the rude bandaging, which he had learned while serving as ship's doctor. Then having brought her back to consciousness, he had threatened her and tortured her to no avail. Pleading for mercy she had denied all knowledge of the fortune or the chart. Exasperated at last, his fiendish mind had contrived the familiar knot about her throat, and he had ransacked her rooms in the building again and again, until becoming frightened at the approach of a lodger he had left, only to return the next morning, when he had been almost espied by the sergeant.

And it was for a last desperate hunt that he had gone to the scene of the murder this evening, and had been captured.

It is several years now since Scarface Dillon paid his debt to humanity on the gallows, yet in a battered and rusty cage before Captain Timothy McCully swings a raucous-voiced old parrot, whom the captain dearly loves to term "Me ould friend, Captain Pate, the one witness in the Snider murther."

Somewhere on the broad Pacific, on an unnamed island, lies an untold wealth of gold and gems, buried deep beneath some swaying palm tree. The chart that caused the untimely death of poor old Mama Snider was never found and if she knew of its existence she died with the secret locked in her heart.

NEXT month: CHECK, IO PAID *by George Gilbert.* Here is the first paragraph: " 'Baysides,' exclaimed Olaf Jensen, indicating the door by which he expected Dan Wilcox, operator at Brooksfjord, to get out. 'Aye bane long tayme tryin' mayke up that Olga's mind she marry Sven Brudkolf. He has four big cabbage varms, much money by bank. You, you are yust tilligrafter and bane poor as a maus.' " Thus Papa Jensen sums up; but Dan the operator turns a deal which offsets his lack of "four big cabbage varms" and nets him something more than the commercial rating of a church mouse.

MRS. BILGER'S VICTORY

By EMMA JONES AND GEIK TURNER

No lawyer for Mrs. Bilger! When she has a claim against the railroad for personal injuries to her cow, she does the collecting herself; and her method of procedure doesn't conform to any rules of practice in or out of the law books.

HE railroad had killed her muley cow, and the railroad had got to pay for it—so said Mrs. Bilger.

Mrs. Bilger was a widow lady residing in the suburbs of Grafton, on the hills of Southern Pennsylvania. Grafton is not an imposing place. It is situated in a hole in the woods mowed out by the sawmill, which forms its principal industry. The business life in Grafton consists in feeding this sawmill, and, as it is not a large one, the town cannot be called populous even at its centre. The situation of Mrs. Bilger's place, in the outskirts, would have reasonably been called retired if it had not been for the fact that the P. D. & Q. Railroad ran through her front yard. In this way a good proportion of the population of the United States passed through Mrs. Bilger's dooryard. Few, however, stopped, except when some train got stalled at the foot of the grade before her house. The P. D. & Q. engines can climb almost anything but a tree, but occasionally in the winter they had to take two or three starts at this grade; it was the worst on the whole road. Occasionally, also, Mrs. Bilger had calls from railroad men, who stopped to drink at her celebrated spring.

The late Mr. Bilger had left his widow her small house and clearing, an eight-year-old son, a double-barreled shot-gun, and her muley cow. A few melancholy hens completed their inventory of estate. Mrs. Bilger, who was a woman of character, made the best of her resources. She herself tickled the shallow surface of her portion of the earth till it burst forth every summer into a sickly grin of scanty potatoes and corn, while her conscientious hens converted the minor by-products of the farm into marketable produce. Her main trust, however, had always been put in her muley cow, who had furnished her a good supply of milk, for which she found a ready sale.

This muley cow would probably not have taken a prize on fancy points at a cattle show; still she was a patient, industrious animal, and a good provider. But at last, unfortunately, the extreme scarcity of provisions drove her to night work, and she wandered onto the railroad track and unintentionally ran against a freight train in the dark. In the morning Mrs. Bilger discovered little more than a fine line of Hamburg steak stretching towards the western horizon. It was a particularly hard blow to her, because she was on the eve of accepting a flattering offer of thirteen dollars for the animal.

There was no doubt in Mrs. Bilger's mind from the first that the railroad would have to settle for her cow. So she informed the station agent the very day following the accident, and after protracted negotiations, which nearly lost the station agent his dinner, the latter agreed to forward a demand for settlement to headquarters. Mrs. Bilger didn't see why he couldn't settle for her martyred cow on the spot, but she was willing to make reasonable concessions. Her final price was twenty-three dollars.

So, after awhile, the station agent forwarded her demand to the division superintendent, and after awhile the division superintendent forwarded it to the division claim agent, and after awhile the division claim agent decided he would send out a man to look up the case. A railroad company does not take unnatural haste in set-

tling up the claims of a poor, ignorant widow. This railroad's fatal mistake was that it did not know what kind of widow it was dealing with.

It took about three weeks in all for the railroad officials to get around to Mrs. Bilger's case, and Mrs. Bilger, deprived of her chief means of sustenance, was becoming somewhat dangerous. She viewed with increasing displeasure the railroad men in general, and especially those who came to get water from her spring.

"Wal, ef they ain't got gall," she was accustomed to say to her Willie in this interval, "killing old muley cow, and then comin' here to get water."

Finally she decided to give her ultimatum.

"Here, you," she said, when the section hands came up one noon for their daily supply, "you get out of thar. You don't get no more water out of my spring till you pay for my muley cow you killed.

"What muley cow? We ain't killed no muley cow," said the astonished section hands; but it was no use to talk to Mrs. Bilger. The railroad had killed her cow, and to her the section hands constituted a a part of one heartless and bloodthirsty corporation, which was responsible. They returned without the water.

The boss, a fat man, who had somewhat of a determined character himself, and who prided himself on his power of invective, was severely sarcastic on their return.

"Gimme that pail, I'll show you how to get the water." He waddled off with the pail in a truly ferocious manner.

Mrs. Bilger was in the house at the time. The section boss walked triumphantly up to the spring and stooped down to take up the water in his pail. The water was some way down in the ground, being confined in a shallow well, walled with stones, and as he was a very fat man, it took him some time to get down to it. Just as he was about to accomplish his purpose he suddenly toppled over head foremost into the spring with the graceful, tilting motion of a mud turtle falling off a log. Mrs. Bilger had waylaid him with her broom.

The section boss was a very close fit for the spring and he made up his mind several times before he unwedged himself that he was a drowned section boss. When he finally did get out, spluttering and swearing, he found himself looking into the muzzles of a double-barrelled shot-gun like a pair of opera glasses. He fled precipitately without his water bucket.

Mrs. Bilger threw the bucket scornfully after him. "I won't take less'n thirty dollars now, cash down," was all she said.

After that it was vain for a railroad man to attempt to use that spring. She watched it most of her spare time herself, and when she didn't she had her boy out. Whenever a railroad man came in sight the child's little piping voice sounded the guard mount, and his mother came on duty with her gun. She didn't say much, but she just walked back and forth before the spring with conscious strength and dignity in her bearing, and deep, hard lines about her mouth. A great many railroad men who had thought they wanted a drink before they saw her, found that they were mistaken and turned away.

By and by however, the section boss got tired of this sort of thing. There was a good deal of work that year, raising the tracks on that grade, and there wasn't another spring for two miles. Finally he decided to negotiate with Mrs. Bilger.

"That's right," said Mrs. Bilger, "you killed my cow and you've got to pay for her. She's wuth jest forty dollars."

So the section boss sought out the road master and told him about the affair, and the road master told the division superintendent. It had been so long since the division superintendent had heard from the station master about Mrs. Bilger's cow that he had forgotten all about it. Besides, it didn't sound like the same cow, anyway, the valuation being so different. So the division superintendent filed another report with the claim department.

Mrs. Bilger, not hearing anything from her appeal for justice, frequented the station at Grafton a great deal, coming in about train time and talking violently to the station agent. Finally, the station agent agreed to write again to the division superintendent. By this time Mrs. Bilger's price was fifty-two dollars.

It so happened at this time that the di-

vision superintendent was off on a short vacation, and his substitute, in an excess of zeal, filed the third cow reported with the claim department.

Before it reached there, however, the division claim agent had visited Mrs. Bilger with a check made out for her first asking price of twenty-three dollars.

"Have you lost two cows, Mrs. Bilger?" said he politely.

"No, I hain't," that worthy woman replied, "only one; but I ain't going to take no twenty-three dollars for it. That cow will cost you just sixty-two dollars now."

"But she wasn't worth any sixty-two dollars," he protested.

"Yes she was, too," said Mrs. Bilger; "countin' the time I've lost foolin' over the blame thing the last three months, an' all I've had to pay for butter and cheese, sixty-two dollars is cheap. Besides, you can pay it just as well as not; you know you've got the money. If you don't I'll take it to the law."

Mrs. Bilger was obstinate, and the claim agent took back his check, and, acting on Mrs. Bilger's threat to go to law, sent over the first two papers on the case to the general claims attorney, intending to see him about it next day. Next day he was called off suddenly to another part of the road. While he was gone the second report from the station agent came along, with a bill for fifty dollars for Mrs. Bilger's muley cow, and, the department claim agent being away, was sent straight to the claims attorney. The three bills confused him.

"What the devil are they doing down there," said the claims attorney when the claim agent came back, "having a massacre of muley cows?"

It took the claim agent some time to explain.

In the meantime Mrs. Bilger began to take the bit in her teeth. She now resolved to suspend traffic generally on the road till they paid some attention to her. For this purpose she secured an old red flannel shirt, and hitching it on the end of an axe helve, began to flag all the trains going up the grade industriously.

"You killed my muley cow, and you've got to pay for her," she said, when the trains came to a standstill. "I won't take less'n sixty-seven dollars for her." It is not necessary to state what the train hands said.

The railroad men finally didn't pay any attention to her red flag at all, so far as stopping went, but as nobody knew just when she might decide to do something serious, like piling up a stone wall on the track, for instance, they watched that flag with considerable curiosity.

And at last she did decide to do something. It was one Tuesday night. She put the boy to bed early; then she prepared for action.

Filling two buckets from the half barrel of soft soap she always kept on tap, and taking a bucket in each hand, Mrs. Bilger started out into the dark, and walked half a mile up the grade. Then she artistically applied her soft soap to about a quarter of a mile of the track.

The next train was a freight due from the east about nine o'clock. She was late that night, and she came down that grade for all she knew how. When she struck that soft soap she slid ahead like a comet rollicking through space; the engine rocked from side to side like a steam launch in a storm. The engineer saw there was something wrong in a minute, and whistled "down brakes" ferociously. The brakemen put on enough power on the brakes to lift her right off the tracks and hold her suspended in the air, but she just plunged ahead through the darkness, squirting soft soap on all the surrounding landscape.

"It's that damned Bilger woman again!" yelled the engineer to the fireman. "What's she done now?"

"Oh, my God!" said the fireman, thinking of his family; "how do I know?"

Then they both held on to the sides of the reeling cab and hoped hard. The engineer swore arpeggios to a sort of running obligato on the whistle. The train went by the station like a demoniac steam caliope escaped from a circus, with a frightened train hand hanging on the brake of every other car. When they finally stopped, two miles down the road, the engineer said he never had such an awful feeling in his life,

—only he didn't say it that way. The fireman was quite seasick.

The worst of it was, they didn't have the least idea what ailed them, because by that time all the soft soap was worn off the wheels. They hadn't the time to look around, anyway, because they had to get down on the next siding for the through ten o'clock passenger train.

The express was extra heavy that night, and the engineer had a horrible rate of speed on her when she reached the grade. Nevertheless, when she struck it she stopped short in two lengths. To the wild dismay of the engineer, the big drivers of his engine just whirled around and around like a top. The engine couldn't get up that grade any more than a man can lift himself by his boot straps. Finally the engineer stopped her, and he and the fireman got out to investigate. Up the grade in front of the engine the rails, in the beams of the headlight, stretched in two strangely glistening lines.

"By thunder!" exclaimed the fireman, stooping down; "it's soft soap."

"Now will you pay me for my muley cow?" said a voice from the darkness. "If you don't you'll never run your darned road again."

It was Mrs. Bilger. Her price had risen to eighty-seven dollars.

It so happened that a very important person was on this train, no less important a person, in fact, than the president of the road. He was in a hurry, too, and he came out of his special car to see what was going on, just as Mrs. Bilger arrived.

"Well, what's the matter here?" said the president.

"Soft soap, sir," said the excited engineer; "this woman's been daubing up the track with soft soap so we can't run the train, because she had her darned cow killed and they won't pay for it."

"Yes, they will," said Mrs. Bilger; "and it'll cost 'em eighty-seven dollars—not a cent less."

Mrs. Bilger felt she was in a position to dictate, and she proposed to do so. The railroad president appreciated the situation.

"Well, my good woman," said he, "don't you think you'd compromise for a little less—say seventy-five?"

"Who are you?" said Mrs. Bilger haughtily.

"Well, I'm the president of this road," said the great official.

"Well, then, I want eighty-seven dollars for my muley cow," said Mrs. Bilger, "and you don't get her for any less."

This amused the president considerably. He took out his fat pocket-book and counted out a big roll of bills. "There you are," said he, "I'll pay it myself." Then he got Mrs. Bilger's mark on a receipt before witnesses, in front of the headlight; and the muley cow was settled for just five months after its death.

After awhile, with the help of the freight engine below, the passenger train was pushed up the grade, the track having been sanded all the way up.

"That muley cow was a good paying property," mused the railroad president, as he seated himself in his special car. "If she'd given a barrel of milk a day, and had a calf every two months since the time of her demise, she wouldn't have yielded such large returns."

IN September, Auntie Miller and Henry come back, after a six months' leave of absence. Look for T'OTHER DEAR CHARMER *by Anna Brownell Dunaway.*

ZEKE

By HORACE J. SIMPSON

With plenty of kisses in prospect, Zeke's loan of five pounds couldn't exactly be called unsecured. Still Zeke should have demanded a promissory note that could have been discounted for hard cash.

LOVE came to Zeke suddenly, strangely, like a blow, on his thirty-second birthday. It made its unheralded, petrifying appearance in the blaze of an August afternoon. At a quarter past three—that was the exact moment when Zeke's amatory instinct awakened and made him rush up and kiss Sophie-Lizzie, on Perseverance Wharf, which is at Wisby Waterless.

You won't find Wisby Waterless on the map, in the railway guides or topographic directories. Those austere public mentors refuse to take cognizance of the compound form. That is a playful antiphrasis, the origin of which is obscure. It may have been in the ireful brain of a local wit whose house had been flooded by the tides which breach the sea walls without fail each winter.

But Wisby—just Wisby—you'll find that printed in the smallest possible type on the map at the head of the muddiest creek in the county of Essex. It's where the Wisby Yellow bricks come from.

And Zeke—Ezekiel Aggis—Zeke was mate of the Jeptha and James, the most decrepit unit of the decrepit fleet of sailing barges owned by the company which burnt the Wisby Yellows—a speechless dolt with a ludicrous grin, butt for the heavy wit of all the bargemen and brickmakers at Wisby Waterless.

Ten years he had sailed with Jerry Broad, the most artful skipper in the Wisby fleet. None but Jerry would have kept him ten days,. The secret came out now and then when Jerry bragged over his pint at the Plough and Sail.

"Zeke'll work when yew ain't looking," Jerry would say, when other skippers jollied him. "I kin enjoy myself ashore all day when he's doin' ut. An' he won't grouse when I come back; he ain't got sense enough. Zeke never opens his mouth 'cept to put a bit o' grub in ut."

That was Zeke.

And Sophie-Lizzie—Sophie Elizabeth Bunt—was maid-of-all work at the Plough and Sail which faced Perseverance Wharf, whereat were loaded into the company's barges the Wisby Yellows aforesaid.

Blunt-nosed, snappy-eyed, dumpy-figured Sophie-Lizzie; household drudge all day—her badge of servitude a dab of grimy lace that forever seemed to cling perilously at the back of her head—at night she washed her face, discarded the dab of lace, planted a bush of red ribbon in her thick hair instead, and odorous of yellow soap, served pints over the bar.

Serving bargees and brickmakers with pints had worked wonders with Sophie-Lizzie. Before she was allowed to do that she would scuttle like a rabbit at the approach of a man. Now she no longer flushed, stammered and dropped mugs in pitiable confusion if a customer bantered and leaned too far over the bar. She could flirt indiscriminately, believing her washed face and red ribbon irresistible.

This, then, was the Sophie-Lizzie who slipped out from the back door of the Plough and Sail, dab of lace and all, shortly after three in the blaze of an August afternoon, and called to Zeke, working like a slave, as Jerry Broad bragged he did—sitting cross-legged on the hatches, pushing a needle through and through a tattered sail with a palm.

"Zeke!" she called down to him from

Perseverance Wharf. "Zeke, I've just popped over to wish yew many happy returns of yewr birthday."

That should have surprised Zeke, should have warned him to be on his guard against the wiles of Sophie-Lizzie. She had never troubled to remember his birthday before.

But Zeke was neither surprised nor warned. He was not affected in any way —then. He didn't even trouble to look up until he had finished pushing his needle through an obstinate seam with the sail-maker's palm.

Then he took time to wipe the sweat from his eyes with the back of his hand, and by almost imperceptible degrees Sophie-Lizzie became aware that she could see less and less of the top of Zeke's tar-stained cap and more and more of his stubbly face and interminable grin.

So she waited, albeit impatiently, for some acknowledgment of her designing good wishes.

But what issued at length from Zeke's slow mouth was no acknowledgment such as she expected. The dolt looked at Sophie-Lizzie, then aloft as if to take stock of the old Barge's standing gear, then back again to Sophie-Lizzie.

"Ut's luvverly weather," he said. And then, bright after-thought, "for the time of the year," he added.

Sophie-Lizzie's snappy eyes snapped faster.

"An' so ut should be, you great stewpid!" she flared. "Ain't ut yewr birthday?"

Zeke lifted the sail-needle and scratched at the back of his ear.

"Is ut?" he said.

"Is ut? Why, of course, ut is! Yew was thirty-tew at ha' past one this mornin'."

His grin smoothed out a little. He stared at Sophie-Lizzie as if she had been a sibyl who for a shilling had revealed the darkest spot in his secret history. His mouth hung open.

Sophie- Lizzie explained the source of her omniscience.

"I know ut," she said, "'cause yewr mother and mine uster laugh an' say it was a race between she an' her. An' yewr mother won, Zeke. I wasn't born till a quarter to two."

Zeke's lips came closer together. The sail-needle explored down the back of his neck for an itching there.

"Well," he observed judicially, "they had luvverly weather for the time of the year."

Sophie-Lizzie seemed to pounce upon him as if she had been on the watch for him to lapse from the straight path. She giggled, sucked in her under-lip, turned up her eyes.

"Ze-e-eke! Ain't yew awful! Fancy joking about a solemn thing like that! Yew are fast!"

She giggled again. She shaded her face in her hands in a too-palpable effort to appear modestly shocked.

Zeke's eyes opened, he became aware that he had a heart, that Sophie-Lizzie's reproof was making it beat a shade faster. Falsely her giggle rang, like the spurious coin it was. But Zeke took it, the reproof that was so palpably flattery, the clumsy affectation of modesty shocked—what had he done to shock it?—took it greedily, proudly. Its false jingle made sweet, unaccustomed music for his dull ears.

Faster and faster his heart thumped. He had tingling sensations inside. Something had happened to him. Suddenly, without rehearsal, he had achieved the impossible thing—become as other men. A woman was hiding her face before him, had reproved him for being fast. He was coming on!

Sophie-Lizzie lowered her shading hand a little; peeped over it. Their eyes met. There was something in Sophie-Lizzie's that Zeke had never seen in a woman's before. There was something subtly sweet in her voice, too.

"Zeke," she said, "yew do surprise me! I never thought you was fast like other men. Yew never come to the Plough and Sail."

He didn't. He put his poor shillings of spare cash in the savings bank instead.

"But after that, after sayin' a thing like that, I shouldn't be surprised if yew was a rare one for the women after all." Sophie-Lizzie sighed. "Oh, yew men!"

She regarded him archly, with ogling invitation. Zeke's heart was thumping madly now. His poor wits reeled, intoxicated by the miracle that was working in him. More than ever he was a man among men. He was fast, he was a rare one for the women! A woman herself had said it; Sophie-Lizzie standing up there on Perseverance Wharf, with a waist to be squeezed, a mouth to be kissed.

He stood staring up at her with glowing eyes, his form stiff like a ramrod, his cheeks burning. Warm, wonderful sensations ran about him like corrosive liquid. The native spark which is in every masculine heart had been fanned suddenly, vigorously. The gilded nimbus of man's prime instinct encircled his tousled head.

For some moments he stood thus, incapable of speech, of movement.

And then, such was the mesmeric power of Sophie-Lizzie's ogling eyes, that all fear, all doubt of himself took unto itself wings. That silly shyness in the presence of women that had always been a salient feature of his doltishness, dropped from him like a suddenly-loosed garment.

There was Sophie-Lizzie, with her voluptuous waist, her full, panting breasts, her large red lips—desirable—attainable!

In a moment Zeke was clambering up the piles of the wharf. Mad, blind, like a charging bull, he rushed at her, caught her. His arm, python-like, crushed her loose waist. He kissed her, full on her large lips, with a loud smacking noise—furiously, impudently, with all the assurance of the confirmed libertine.

She struggled. His onslaught made her gasp for breath. She lifted her big red hand, spread it over his mouth, and pushed his face back with all her strength.

"What yew doin'?" she panted. "What—what d'yew mean by ut—kissin' me? I ain't yewr gal."

Zeke fell back like a drunken man reeling from the policeman's push. His head hung sheepishly. The gilded nimbus dissolved. The sensations inside him went cold, leaving him numb. His grin seemed to freeze on his face. His expression was ghastly.

He had kissed a woman! He had done an incredible, nightmarish thing. He stared pitiably about him, as if seeking a hole to rush down and hide in, away from the awful consequences of his momentary madness.

But such speechless, paralyzing terror was only a shadow, only a passing shadow, obscuring the sun for a moment and chilling the world. Sophie-Lizzie laughed. Laughed!

And Zeke heard her. It sounded thin, far-off, like a voice across the water. His scattered wits came back slowly. He raised his face and looked at Sophie-Lizzie with insensate cautiousness out of the corner of one eye. Their glances met. For a moment or so every nerve in his being stretched taut with suspense, racking him poignantly. And then the cruel tension relaxed. Sophie-Lizzie laughed again, tittered inanely, with mock prudery in her snappy eyes.

"Zeke," she said. "Ain't yew awful!"

Zeke breathed again—took in a deep draught of air like an army recruit expanding his chest for the doctor's approval, exhaled it like the sigh of a tired horse.

"I dunno," he said. "Am I?"

"Yes, yew are! You fair took my breath away. Yew made me forgit what I come for."

She seemed to be trying hard to recollect, passing her red hand over her mouth and snapping her eyes at a rapid rate.

Zeke's face brightened with marvelous sagacity.

"I know," he said. "You come 'cause ut's my birthday."

But the slight negative sign which Sophie-Lizzie made with her head indicated that Zeke's sagacious inspiration had grievously misled him.

"Somethin' else as well," muttered Sophie-Lizzie. "Ut was—"

She paused, seeming to scan every detail of his doltish physiognomy. Her own face wore a composite expression in which caution and desperation seemed to be quarrelling, with rude coquetry looking on.

"Zeke," she resumed suddenly, her voice meant to be honey-flavored, "ut was to ask yew somethin' what I wouldn't ask anybody else in the world."

She edged closer, making play with her eyes. And Zeke, dolt as he was, could not mistake the signs. They invited him to squeeze her loose waist again if he so minded, they assured him that he might take his fill of her lips with no risk of having a hand clapped over his mouth.

The sensations like corrosive liquid heated him again. The gilded nimbus blazed about his head, but the emotions which thrilled his dull soul now were tempered by a nightmarish recollection that held the predatory instinct reined hard, like a horse ridden on a curb.

Sophie-Lizzie's eyes snapped her opinion of such a slow dolt. Her body stiffened. There was a silent, tense period of calculating immobility; and then desperation prevailed in the struggle on her features, overthrew caution with such a crash that onlooking coquetry fled.

"Zeke," she said. "I come over to ask yew to lend me five pound."

The murder was out. Her good wishes for his birthday revealed themselves impudently as mere scouts in enemy country. She brought up her main forces now and attacked with one overwhelming rush.

Zeke stared at her with a stupid, wondering gaze. Her assault wavered. She shrugged her shoulders, and giggled doubtfully.

"I know ut's a lot o' money," she admitted. "I wouldn't ha' asked yew—only—"

Something new and strange in Zeke's face stopped her; something that seemed to take his doltish features, his ludicrous grin, in magic hands and remodel them with one swift, deft movement; something that changed, transfigured him. She felt curiously as if she had just seen a mother lug a dirty, howling child in at the back door and set it out again on the front step with a clean pinafore and a washed face.

But before she could analyze definitely the thing she saw, Zeke took a step to the edge of the wharf and clambered back to the deck of the Jeptha and James.

"Zeke!" she cried. "Where yew goin'? Yew ain't—yew ain't answered my question yet."

He grinned, but otherwise took no heed of her. She saw his awkward figure shambling aft, watched it back down the cabin ladder, sinking from view in jerks until all she could see of him was the top of his tar-stained cap. And then that, too, disappeared, and Sophie-Lizzie was left alone, utterly incapable of deciding the significance of Zeke's abrupt going.

He might mean to lend her the sum she had brazenly asked for, or he might not. It was hardly worth while worrying about. She had thrown her loaded die; if it tumbled perversely the fault was not hers.

Somewhat in this wise argued Sophie-Lizzie, until Zeke's tar-stained cap reappeared above the companion-hatch. And in an instant she saw that her die had fallen obediently on its weighted side! She could not see the money in his hand. She didn't need to. What she saw on his face was enough. She was no fool. Serving pints at the Plough and Sail, bantering brickies and bargees—setting them back in their places too, when they deserved it—was an experience that had sharpened her wits.

With eyes that snapped fast, and looked everywhere but at Zeke, she waited until he had clambered back onto the wharf beside her.

"Here, Sophie-Lizzie!" she heard him say suddenly. "Here ut is!"

She held out her hand, her eyes gloating, her smile rapacious.

"Ut's—ut's a lot o' money, Zeke," she murmured, as if virtuously protesting.

He laughed joyously. He was elate. Her need was his opportunity. If Jerry Broad, or anyone else in the world, had asked him for the loan of a mere shilling, he would have hesitated, almost certainly he would have refused. Like most fools, Zeke hoarded and hugged his money.

"No," he said with proud emphasis, "ut ain't a lot o' money! I got double that down there in the cabin. An' I got over fifty pound in th' bank."

Sophie-Lizzie feigned a sort of surprise, but it was stale news to her. Not for nothing had she listened to Jerry Broad's talk over his beer.

"My!" she said. "Fancy that now,

He sidled nearer. His voice became low, quavering,

"Sophie-Lizzie," he said. "I'd do anything for yew, I would."

She backed away. For one moment something that flashed from his eyes lighted up her puny soul, discovered her contemptible meanness, as lightning at night reveals the inscrutable mystery of the sleeping earth.

She turned from him suddenly and ran. If she had stayed another moment Zeke's five pounds would have been flung at his feet. The money seemed to have turned white-hot in her hands, flaying the flesh from her fingers. She ran away.

Zeke made no attempt to follow her. His wits were too slow-moving. He stood staring the way she had gone. He didn't get angry. He knew no emotion save a vaguely-sweet something that was slowly flooding his soul; something different in degree from that first mad exhiliration, softer, more subtly refreshing. In comparison it was like purified, rain-washed air after a thunderstorm.

That was a little after quarter past three in the afternoon.

At six, or thereabouts, Jerry Broad returned to the Jeptha and James.

He was amazed. Zeke, the patient slave, was not working! He had changed his tar-smeared workaday gear for a shore-going rig that Jerry had not seen him wear more than half a dozen times in ten years. He had cleaned his boots, washed his face, shaved his stubbly chin, oiled his hair.

"Goo' Lor'!" said Jerry. "Where yew hikin' off to?—got up in that clobber like a barber's clerk o' Wednesday afternoons!"

Zeke faced his taskmaster with newborn audacity.

"I kin go ashore if I like," he said. "I'm goin' to the Plough and Sail. I'm goin' to see Sophie-Lizzie."

"Eh?" said Jerry. "Yew don't drink beer! I ain't never knowed yew to!"

"No," said grinning Zeke, "an' yew never will. I like lemon squash better'n beer."

"An' you ain't never bin one to go hangin' about after th' women!" argued Jerry.

Whereat Zeke stiffened proudly.

"I turned over a new leaf," he said. "I've kissed Sophie-Lizzie, I have! I kissed her up there on th' wharf this afternoon!"

Jerry stared wildly—stared until a paroxysm seized him, racked him with hilarious convulsions.

"Yew—yew great jack-ass! Yew nacheral-born imbecile! Yew've gorn an' done ut—you have! Darky Spitty'll do yew in—sure's yew'r the biggest fool in Waterless!"

"Eh?" said wondering Zeke. "Darky Spitty?"

"Ay, Darky Spitty! D'yew think he'll stand yew hanky-pankying about with Sophie-Lizzie? Don't yew fret! Him an' her's gittin' married. The job comes off Sunday morning."

Zeke staggered. He clutched at the tiller-head with feeble fingers, held on there, the blood draining from his features till he looked like a ghastly image in chalk.

"Darky Spitty!" he gulped. "Him marrying her? Why, he ain't got th' money to git married on! He—he spends it all at th' Plough and Sail!"

Jerry shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"He's borried some," he said. "Leastways, Sophie-Lizzie's borried ut for him. Wheedled five pounds out of some poor fool. I heard ut out o' Darky's own mouth just now. Five pound—that'll pay th' parson and buy th' beer. They've took a furnished room with old Mother Jarvis."

He paused, looking at Zeke, gloating over the discomfiture of the poor fool, and then went on, every word a stab at Zeke's lacerated soul.

"If yew've been kissing Sophie-Lizzie," he said, "I wouldn't like to stand in your shoes. Yew know what Darky is! Yew'd best go an' git a weddin' present, and give ut to her before she tells him."

Zeke half turned then. He faced Jerry Broad with a look in his eyes like a sheep's mute, pitiable appeal under the butcher's knife.

"I done ut," he said faintly. "I give her a weddin' present."

"Ho!" Jerry chuckled sceptically. "What'd yew give? A five-pound note?"

"No," said Zeke. "I give five sovereigns."

And then, with sudden pathetic defiance, he added:

"An' I'd give ut again! I'd give ten—to Sophie-Lizzie!"

He let go the tiller-head, dashed from it like a greyhound from the slips, pushed Jerry aside without ceremony, and started clambering down the companion-ladder.

"Here!" shouted Jerry affronted. "Where the devil yew shovin' to? What yew doin', yew fool!"

The answer came from the depths of the cabin.

"I don't like these dam' shore-goin' duds!" said Zeke. "They hurt me! I'm a-goin' to take 'em off!"

THE BLACK CAT CLUB

THE OTHER MAN'S CHANCE by Robert E. Hewes was the prize winning story for May. Prizes for criticisms were awarded to the following persons: Miss Harriette Wilbur, Duluth, Minn.; Miss Myretta Chatham, Albany, N. Y.; W. A. Sternberg, Tacoma, Wash.; Mrs. John R. Powell, St. Louis, Mo.; G. Lombard Kelly, Asheville, N. C.; Miss Bessie Loesges. Riverside, Ills.; Henry D. Muir, Chicago, Ills.; Miss Marie Miner, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Miss Bessie M. Dow, Omaha, Nebr.

The Other Man's Chance is a worthwhile variation of the Good Samaritan theme. Mason's struggle with the elements classes him as a physical superman, while his unselfish decision gives him moral supremacy. The author blunders in permitting the stranger to remain conscious too long. The latter should faint while Mason is explaining his presence, for the revelation of his wealth minimizes the reader's interest in Mason's temptation to go on rather than turn back. Keeping the stranger's wealth a secret until he is safe at Old Jim's would have made the reader much more in sympathy with Mason's spiritual struggle, although any other decision would be reprehensible. Spiritual struggle emphasized in a tale of tremendous physical exertion is a relief, but it comes near to being over emphasized in this instance. The whole mush is a thrilling spectacle—graphic, without being over detailed. There is just a shade of "too good to be true" impression at the end, for Mason's being "found" is more sentimental than real. While not a particularly novel dénouement, nor a strong one because of the strain on probability, it satisfies, nevertheless, the old-fashioned demand of one's nature, that reward shall come to the worthy.

The Three Husbands of Mazie is a delightfully light and cheerful story, well conceived and consistently wrought. The theme is decidedly original, and the story is written in lively tempo. The diverting attempts of Mazie to eat her cake and sleep well too, constitute a laughable exposition of young married life. It is thoroughly modern, even to exchanging the traditional skeleton in the closet for a ghost with one stocking up and the other down. Mazie is altogether charming, but lacks stability and balance; so her doting husband gives her allopathic treatment that works a wonderful cure. Perhaps the best thing about the story is Mazie's attitude in taking the treatment. She is game—most of the time, at least—and plays up to any sort of husband Custer volunteers to be. The humor is a trifle forced in places, particularly in the scene with Aunt Flavia. Custer's heavy, strained wit does not merit Mazie's extravagant giggles, and in her appreciation of his efforts she seems, like him, anxious to please. Some of his unconscious humor is better, such as his slang, his new twists to hackneyed expressions, and his naive observations.

Joe Dreese's Getaway is exciting and entertaining, but will not bear close scrutiny. The main character is so weak that he involuntarily plays second to the stronger Whedon. In guiding his brain-children through their vicissitudes the question in the writer's mind should be not what is the moral and proper action, but what is the logical thing for them to do if they are to live and breathe? To the thoughtless, Joe's reform may appear highly satisfactory. Hold the analytical mirror steady and one sees a quitter. Had Fallegon and Whedon survived, Joe would have continued his downward course, bottle in one hand and gun in the other. Lacking the familiar support, he went the way of least resistance; and did some analysis of his own, for he calculated nicely how severe the penalty would be. He had the convictions without the courage, otherwise he would have fought the evil without taking a jail cure. In other respects the story is satisfactory. The gang on horseback in the outskirts of the town starts the action and creates the suspense at once. The entire action of the story which follows is perfectly vivid and is especially praise-worthy in that it is not overdrawn. Though one hopes that Joe Dreese will get away, it is a complete surprise that it should turn out to be a getaway from the root of the crime. The full force of the author's in-

tention does not strike the reader until the close.

A Night in Paris, Mass. is the embodiment of mysticism—Oriental mysticism in a New England garden. The juxtaposition of the word "Paris" and the abbreviation for the dignified old Commonwealth of Massachusetts, affords a good device for forecasting whimsicality in this story of strange adventure in provincial and conventional setting. The incidents of the story were well worked out in advance and co-ordinate nicely to give a progressive and unified impression, except as to the Chinaman. He doesn't belong; cut out all incidents built around him and the story would lose nothing thereby.

An Idyll of Cape De Castro does not deal with ideal conditions, but the reader is not horrified at Tong Sue's device for ridding himself of his enemies, because the proportion of one to four makes him the under dog and naturally a candidate for sympathy. Indeed, the sarcasm of the word "idyll" is carried through the whole story. The author's artistry is apparent throughout the story, in such touches as, "the strip of white ran like a lace insertion," and in his use of suggestion rather than statement. The restrained, non-committal style is well suited to the story and makes it more pleasing than the subject matter would otherwise permit. It is a very condensed story. the incidents moving in rapid and direct sequence to the climax; there is one pre-eminent character and one predominating incident and the other elements of a short story; a fanciful situation is created, not at all illogical, given a heathen Chinese versed in tricks and strategems, which would have won against his ruthless enemies if fate had not intervened and made it five straight instead of four of a kind. The brevity and completeness of it remind one just a bit of "The Promise," so highly commended in a previous issue; but the range of dramatic action and human emotion is so slight that it could hardly rank with that story.

The Creditors' Meeting depicts with faithfulness an incident in the life of a mediocre young man. There are countless thousands of young men living from hand-to-mouth just like Hammel, with nothing more to look forward to than Saturday's pay envelope. Hammel's difficulties in trying to avoid the creditors' meeting offers a humorous situation. Given a sensitive character like Hammel—who is not so sensitive as to dread frequent hiring and firing—and his sufferings as a debtor are natural. Happily, he still preserves an acute sense of moral obligation and is tremendously worried because he cannot pay back the twenty-five dollars that he owes. Twenty-five dollars is a fabulous sum when one hasn't it. His worries make him a coward and he tries to dodge the two men to whom he owes money who are seeking him; and in this fact rests the twist of the story, for they are not hunting him to demand payment but to give him a good job. The author has compressed his material within a single viewpoint, and a short time limit; and this concentration is wise, since it enables him to work out the slight plot to the minutest detail.

In *The Watchers of the Wild*, the author does not live up to past performances. The story is engrossing, but unsatisfactory. The author probably meant it to be a story of atmosphere, based on the winter wind as symbolical of the locale, and in accentuating his idea, he was careless in plot incidents. The setting is unique, and in that and the wind motive lies the chief interest of the story, which is really a combination of many horrors—a lonely setting, a winter storm, an urgent duty, a sick man, lost food, insanity, the insistent wind, and so on. To carry out the subject idea, the principal actor is given the shattered nerves of a dope-fiend, in addition to his selfishness, gambler's superstition and incompetence, making fulfilment of difficult, but ordinary duty, a horrible nightmare. As a dope-fiend deprived of his dope, Vincent should suffer more than from hunger and Billy's ravings; indeed, he should show Billy a thing or two in the raving line. Billy's return to sanity is over-prompt, too, unless he is faking the whole thing for Vincent's benefit, which the author does not seem to intend. It is not a natural thing to happen, for if his brain trouble had been the delirium of privation it probably would have disappeared when he again had sufficient to eat. His insanity could hardly be "snuffed out" merely by the blowing of the Fish Queen whistle.

The Ill Wind and the Assessorship begins with the general and proceeds to the specific. In it the author satirizes the fact that in a certain county physically deficient men have always obtained the offices through pity rather than any political fitness. The first candidate is minus an arm and the second a leg, whereupon a man who declares himself sound in mind and body decides to put a stop to the tradition which permits men to make issues of their physical infirmities. Each thinks that the psychological moment has arrived to land a soft berth. But the best stroke in the story is the announcement of the fourth candidate, who is a one-armed, one-legged, intelligent man, thus possessing all the qualities of the other three. He is also a good politician and offers deputy assessorships to the two opposing cripples, relying on the sentiment that has prevailed for so many years. The third man reads the hand-writing on the wall and returns to his job, abandoning his campaign in the middle of the contest, for he figures that the fourth man's psychology cannot be beaten.

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